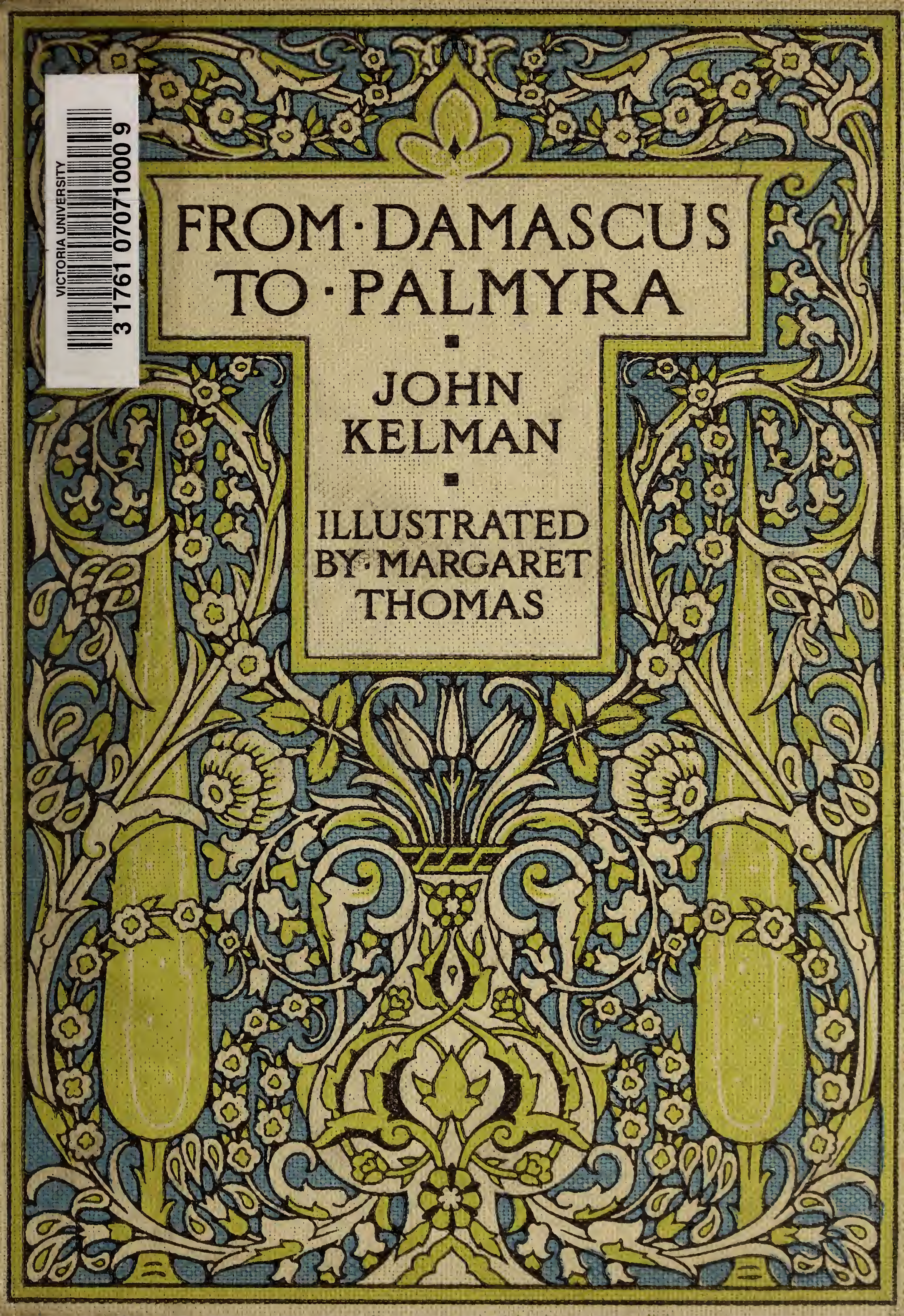
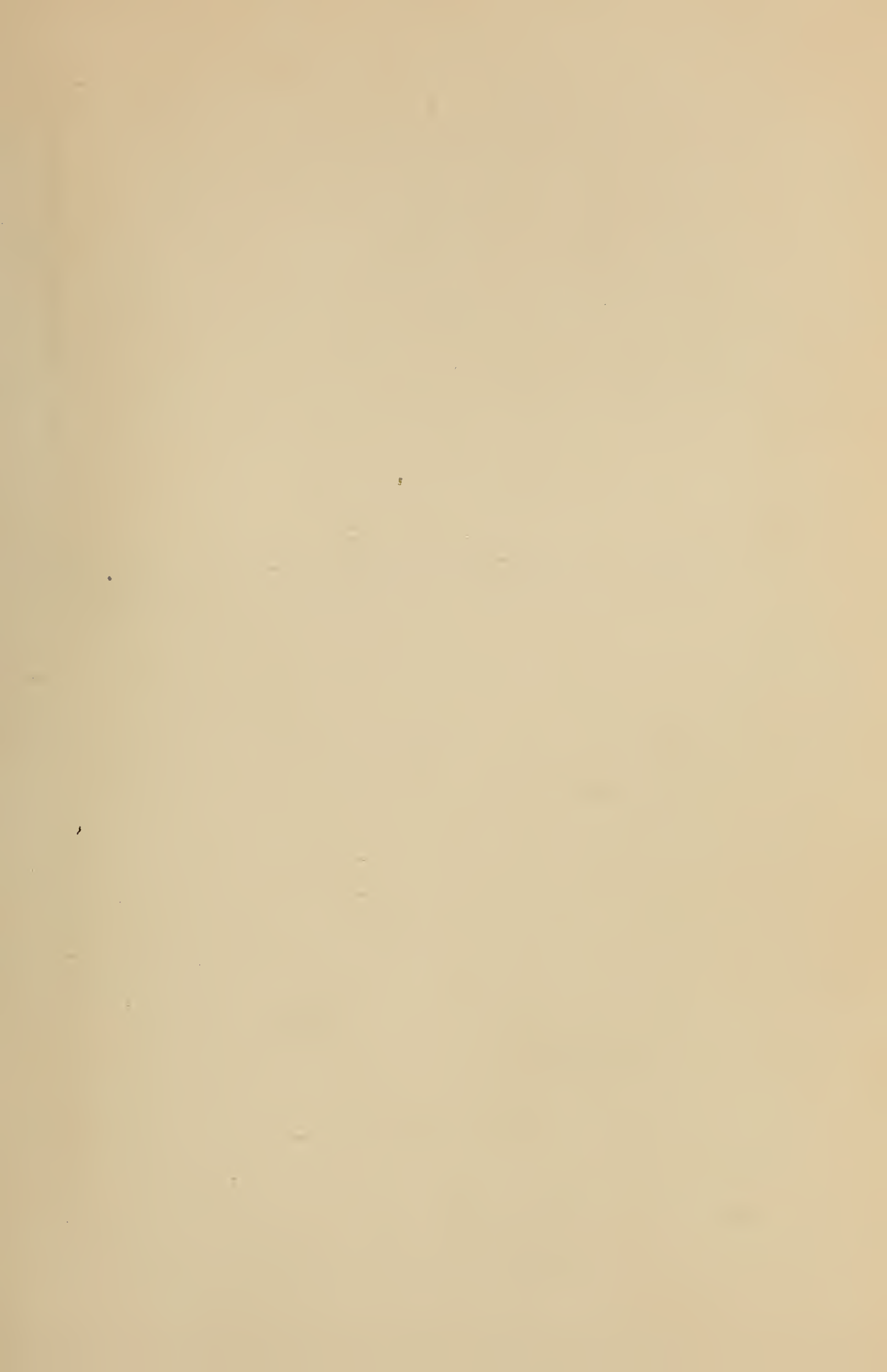

FROM · DAMASCUS
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ILLUSTRATED
BY · MARGARET
THOMAS







FROM DAMASCUS TO PALMYRA

AGENTS

America . The Macmillan Company
64 & 66 Fifth Avenue, New York

Australasia The Oxford University Press, Melbourne

Canada . The Macmillan Company of Canada, Ltd.
27 Richmond Street West, Toronto

India . . Macmillan & Company, Ltd.
Macmillan Building, Bombay
309 Bow Bazaar Street, Calcutta



FROM DAMASCUS TO PALMYRA

BY

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PAINTED BY

MARGARET THOMAS



LONDON

ADAM AND CHARLES BLACK

1908

Preface

"*PRAY, sir, what and where is Palmyra?*" "*'Tis a hill in Ireland, with palms growing on the top and a bog at the bottom, and so they call it Palm-Mira.*" *The ingenuous youth took the answer seriously, and Dr. Johnson, repenting of his rudeness,* "*told him the history, chronology, and geography of Tadmor in the Wilderness with every incident, I think, that literature could furnish or eloquence express, from the building of Solomon's palace down to the voyage of Dawkins and Wood.*" *An enviable youth, truly! not only because he drew the lexicographer, but because he was born so soon. In those days the historian of Palmyra moved with great assurance amid a more brilliant world of romance than is open to any man to-day.*

He who would write about Palmyra is tempted by two alternatives. He may, but not without long and patient study, gather what authentic information is to be had from a multitude of ancient and modern sources, and so reconstruct for the use of posterity one of the least familiar

and yet most interesting periods of history. He may, on the other hand, set his imagination free from the dull restraint of facts, and add another to the wonderful tales of Arabia. Each alternative is waiting for its author, for, in spite of all that has been written, the real history and the perfect novel are yet to come.

Needless to say, I have attempted no such task as these. The present volume arose out of a journey memorable for its delightfulness, both of incidents and of companions. The small margin of leisure which a busy life allows, has for two years been devoted to the recording of impressions then gained and noted, and to the interpreting of these by such study of history as I was able to give to the subject. I have expressed, as best I could, the colour and spirit of the region, and told the story of its ancient life. The defects of such casual work are obvious, and yet it has also some advantages. The passing stranger's eye and ear may catch impressions of quaint things and interesting people which one more accustomed would neither see nor hear. As to the history, I have been able only to look over the edge of a land which I would gladly have explored. Nothing could be more tantalising than thus to hear the call of the ancient East, and yet go no farther than the borderland.

When these chapters were written, the ancient régime was still dominant in Turkey, nor did the world dream that the immediate future was to witness the most momentous event that has happened since the Turkish Empire was

founded. When the new constitution was granted it was too late to rewrite this book, which has thus gained the curious distinction of being the last of the countless records of the impression which Oriental rule of the older days made upon the mind of the modern traveller from the West.

The objective of the book is Palmyra, but it reaches its destination by way of Beyrout, Baalbek, and Damascus. Only a passing glimpse at these cities is allowed us, but I have tried to give character to these glimpses by taking each of them as a type or symbol of one aspect of Oriental life. Beyrout may stand for the modern contact of East and West, Baalbek for the same contact in Graeco-Roman times, and Damascus sits dreaming her timeless dream. Palmyra appropriates the last six of the thirteen chapters. Lebanon, Coelesyria, Antilibanus, Oasis Villages, and the Desert are each of them component parts of the region, without some knowledge of which the story of Palmyra would be incomplete.

As to the literature of the subject, the best known popular English works are Wright's "Palmyra and Zenobia" and Ware's "Letters to Rome." The latter, now long out of print, is one of those charming books which never grow old. Its mixture of Roman sentiment with early Victorian Christianity suggests an Imperial Senator conducting a Bible Class, but the author's sympathy and vital force give to the letters a singular power of appealing to each new

generation. The imperial biographers, Zosimus, Vopiscus, and Trebellius Pollio, are sources of much picturesque tradition. Of late years they have been to a large extent discarded in favour of the records found on coins and inscriptions; and the contrast between Gibbon's and Mommsen's histories marks the change. I have made little use of the earlier authorities or of Gibbon, but from Mommsen's great work I have drawn very freely in some of my later chapters. I have also consulted Arnold's "Studies in Roman Imperialism," Stuart Jones's "Roman Empire," and other recent works. For inscriptions, I have used the collections of Le Bas-Waddington, Vogüé, G. A. Cooke, Sterrett, and Clermont-Ganneau. As to architecture, the folio of Dawkins and Wood, who visited Palmyra in 1751, *immediately before a great earthquake which destroyed much of the building that remained, forms a stepping-stone between the twentieth and the third century, and its magnificent wood-engravings almost reconstruct the city before our eyes. In my estimate of the religious thought which lay behind the huge and costly temples of the third century, I have relied mainly upon Professor Dill's two volumes on "Roman Society," and I acknowledge with much gratitude the debt which my concluding chapter owes to him.*

Many friends have been with me in this venture. Dr. Frank Mackinnon of Damascus will perceive, as he reads, how much I owe him; I wish he could in the least degree realise how profound an impression his influence upon the

East made upon my mind as we travelled together among the Arab villages. Dr. H. G. G. Mackenzie will remember many things that have enriched our long friendship, and will recognise many of his own gifts to the book we have so often discussed. Dr. James Craw, who also journeyed with us for some days, has already laid down his strenuous and devoted life, and affectionate memories of his companionship haunt the valleys of Lebanon and the Temples of Baalbek. Professor George Adam Smith, ever generous in guidance and great in encouragement, has done much for me in this as in all other work of mine; and the Rev. E. J. Hagan has shared, with characteristic kindness and enthusiasm, much of my research among books and inscriptions.

To these friends, and to Ellin and Barbara Kelman, whose unfailing interest and willing help have endeared the task to me from first to last, I offer very gratefully this volume.

JOHN KELMAN.



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[*The photographs were taken by Dr. H. G. G. Mackenzie and the writer.*]

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FROM DAMASCUS TO PALMYRA

CHAPTER I

EAST AND WEST

"Look how wide the East is also from the West." The familiar words assume a new and almost startling significance when we apply them to those differences of national genius and spirit which have, all along the line of history, created situations at once the most dangerous and the most fascinating. As to the causes of that separation, no doubt the scale and the character of Nature as it is seen at play on man must be taken into account. The Nearer East, at least, is dominated by the Desert just as Britain is by the Sea. Behind all the thoughts of the Eastern there hovers some desert image or idea, and his characteristic moods of thought and feeling perplex the Western with the suggestion of a stony and artificial kind of desert beauty. Yet, just as all shadows in the desert turn to purple in the evening light, so that external sense of unhomeliness may at any time pass suddenly to another mood, revealing undreamed-of inward stores of passion.

Nature counts for something, though it is probable

that Mr. Buckle would find few thinkers now to follow him in his estimate of the overwhelming power of such influences over man and society. Yet, be the causes what they may, the divergence is profound. It is a difference, not so much of view, as of point of view; not so much of convictions, as of the faculties employed for arriving at convictions. In his well-known book, *Asia and Europe*, Mr. Townsend has, from many sides and in countless graphic ways, analysed and described the contrast. In general it is often the contrast between the ideals of peace on the one hand and restless energy on the other. The Eastern lingers among thoughts and images for the mere sake of thinking them, while the Western deals with them rather that he may turn them to some practical account. It has been regarded as the contrast between the active and the passive mental states; and, in spite of much that is needed to qualify this view, it is probably that which runs deepest toward the heart of the matter. Even in magic lore, where one might expect greater uniformity, this difference is apparent. The East has its magic carpets, or rings, or lamps; the West its magic horn, or spear, or sword. Of religion the same thing is true. It is not justifiable to assert that the East is essentially religious and the West essentially secular, for there is a religion of will and reason as well as one of feeling and of dream. But the religion of the Oriental is and must always be a different thing from that of the Western. For the former, the truth or falsehood of a belief is not the chief matter, but its poignancy and vividness.

He deals with his religious conceptions, not to find a rational solution of definite problems, but as he handles jewels—for the sudden flashing of hidden lights, for the passionate colour of the ruby or the subtle play of the mysterious opal. Consequently, the expression of religion is ritual for the Eastern, and not a rationalised system of thought. He will not be forced to define, but will be satisfied with performing rites which he feels to be suggestive, and charged with emotional possibilities.

This is only one phase of a wider and more radical diversity, viz. the attitude of East and West to the unknown in general. Love of mystery goes along with the lack of sustained energy. When the question arises as to what is behind the veil, or over the edge of the mountain, the adventurous spirit of the West at once urges the man to go out and see and face it. The Eastern cannot understand that spirit. He feels no tempting attraction to the solution of the mystery by natural causes. He greatly prefers the supernatural, and lies still, admitting all manner of superstitions, and even of fears, in preference to discovered explanations. The supernatural agencies may be dangerous, but there is a zest in the uncertainty, and at least the plan saves trouble.

That way lies fatalism, of course—the most distinctive feature of the East. While the West takes matters, or tries to take them, into its own hands, the East lies back in the grand repose that leaves all things to the Powers that are ultimately responsible for them.

So far does this go, that as Townsend has pointed out, it actually includes the choices of men also. Man's will, once exerted, closes on his purpose with a fatalistic grip, and the man is steel-bound. Obviously the world in which this is the natural order is another world from that Western one which owes all its history to an undying curiosity, a restless strenuousness, and an altogether astonishing readiness to accept responsibilities.

Having seen this wide and radical diversity, we now turn with greater interest to the consideration of what has resulted when these two diverse races have been brought into contact. It so happens that the tract which this volume will traverse is one of the most important meeting-places of East and West, both for ancient and for modern history; and any facts which we may see as we travel must derive a special interest from their bearing on this problem.

As a starting-point, we may quote the dictum of Martin Conway,[1] that "as every individual is the child of two parents, so is every advance in civilisation the offspring of mixed influences. The progressive races have always been mixed. An isolated tribe remains stationary. It is when tribes of different tendency and varied capacity come in contact that new ideals arise and new civilisations are created. . . . The great civilisations have always arisen at the meeting-places of ideas." Every one who reads these words must be struck by their resemblance to some of Mr. Darwin's

[1] *Dawn of Art*, pp. 59-76.



GREAT MOSQUE, DAMASCUS





teaching, and will remember historical instances which confirm them, such as the blend, first of the Celtic and Teutonic races, and then that of the Norman Conquest, in our own island.

Mr. Conway[1] goes on to show that his principle applies especially to the meeting of East and West: "The contact between East and West has always been the prolific source of the advancement of humanity. That contact is now maintained by elaborate media of communication and commerce. At the dawn of history, it was only when men were actually adjacent that they could so influence one another. The first great civilisations, therefore, arose at places on the margin of contact between the most advanced peoples of the great continents."

By far the most significant of all instances of such contact was that in which the Graeco-Roman civilisation forced itself upon the East in Syria and Asia Minor. Even in the first hour of conquest, amid the bitterness of invasion, much could be seen which gave rich promise of a future.[2] But the Christian era came at last, and it found the world prepared for it more by the fact of this contact than by any other of the facts of the time. Judea until then had been an oasis, a garden enclosed, within which the seeds of a religion, planted in remote antiquity, had grown into a great tree of life. Then suddenly the oasis became a focus, whence the new

[1] *Dawn of Art*, p. 59.
[2] Cf. G. A. Smith, *Jerusalem*, bk. iii. ch. xv.

faith and the wonderful vital forces which it generated and set free, were already spreading out to the ends of the earth. Christianity has often been pronounced too Western for Orientals; yet so Eastern is it that we of the West have to orientalise our conceptions before we can understand it. The days of the early Christian Church were the most vital days that the world has ever seen. And that wonderful quickening of the human spirit came precisely at the time of this great blending. The inscription on the Cross of Jesus was written in Hebrew and Greek and Latin.

For centuries afterwards the contact still remained, vitalising the world in various ways. The Alexandrian philosophy was its direct result. And in the regions of Syria and Asia Minor, where "Orontes flowed into Tiber," it was not merely in sensuality that the record of the blend was written. The East lay open to receive the benefits which Rome had to give—benefits of stable government and of national and civic institutions. The West, uncomprehending, received those mystic and colossal ideas whose expression and monument alike are found in the architecture of the ancient cities of our region—voluptuous excess of ornament and extravagance of size being added to the splendid workmanship and perfectly proportioned design which the West had brought.

Dipping into history at a period later by several centuries, we find Bagdad, under its most famous khalifs, first sending its ambassadors to the West for literature from Egypt and from Greece, and then

becoming a centre of learning while Europe was as yet in darkness. The darkness at length was scattered by the Renaissance, which the Crusades brought back to lands still farther west; so that when Europe awoke from her slumber, it was to a life and thought quickened by this same contact.

It must be confessed that when we turn from the older to the modern time, the change is startling and depressing in those regions. The crowds among which you journey along the Syrian coast in the steamer are probably as fascinating spectacles of the varieties of human type as could anywhere be found. Friars and ecclesiastics of many orders, religious cranks of every shade of absurdity; commercial men scheming for the sale of European goods in Asiatic markets, officers and diplomatists watching military developments on the spot; ladies, whose dress would be conspicuous in a Paris *salon*, and boatmen lying asleep along their boats amid the yelling of their brethren; American tourists with money to spend, and clusters of Syrians with French boots and primitive manners nestling among fragrant bales of oranges—what a phantasmagoria it all is!

Most travellers obtain their first ideas of the actual blend in Egypt. At Port Said, standing at the end of the breakwater, as if it had marched into the waters of the sea to meet the advancing world, is the great bronze statue of M. de Lesseps, with its inscription, "*Aperire terram gentibus.*" Inside the town, which it has taken these many years of British rule to bring

even to its present very moderate conditions of decency, newspapers were being printed and sold in 1906 inviting the Egyptians to rise against their rulers in a pan-Mohammedan war. Alexandria, with its alternate palm-trees and plaster, has a railway station now on the site of its ancient library, and everywhere the ground is strewn with the mingled litter of ancient palaces and modern artillery. Near Cairo the far-gazing Sphinx smiles that beautiful and mysterious smile of hers over the heads of modern tourists, of whose insulting kodaks and magnesium wire she knows nothing. Egypt presented an extraordinary problem, and the degree in which the genius of Lord Cromer has solved it is wonderful indeed. Yet, while giving all honour to that splendid work, the problems still remain, and force one to ask to what extent there has been any real and vitalising fusion of East and West in Egypt. Both East and West, so far as outward advantage goes, have gained enormously, but only the future will show how far there has been the upspringing of a purified and enriched human spirit from the contact as in ancient days.

But it is in the Levantine cities that one may best study the blend, for these are the crucibles wherein East and West are being fused to-day into the new amalgam. Everywhere, indeed, in Syria, the intrusion of the West is to be seen. Damascus is full of it, the green jade handles of ancient Arab weapons lying for sale side by side with Manchester handkerchiefs of violent colours. Follow the staggering line of



BEYROUT, SHOWING MOUNT SANNÎN AND THE LAZARETTO, EARLY MORNING LIGHT





telegraph posts across the waste, and at the end of the sagging wire you may meet at Nebk with a Turkish soldier, a Greek priest, and a youth newly returned from America. Cross the desert to Palmyra, and you shall find an Arab who has lived in France, and whose picture adorns a post-card ; and a man in white robes and turban, his long beard flowing in crisp wavelets that suggest a figure emerged from some Assyrian sculpture—a man who has travelled over Persia, India, and Europe. Recross the desert, among the villages where Moslems build flat roofs and Christians conical ones over houses lit by gaudy European paraffin lamps, till at Homs on the Orontes your dream of the East will be broken by the giddy strains of gramophones shouting out music-hall ditties in the cafés.

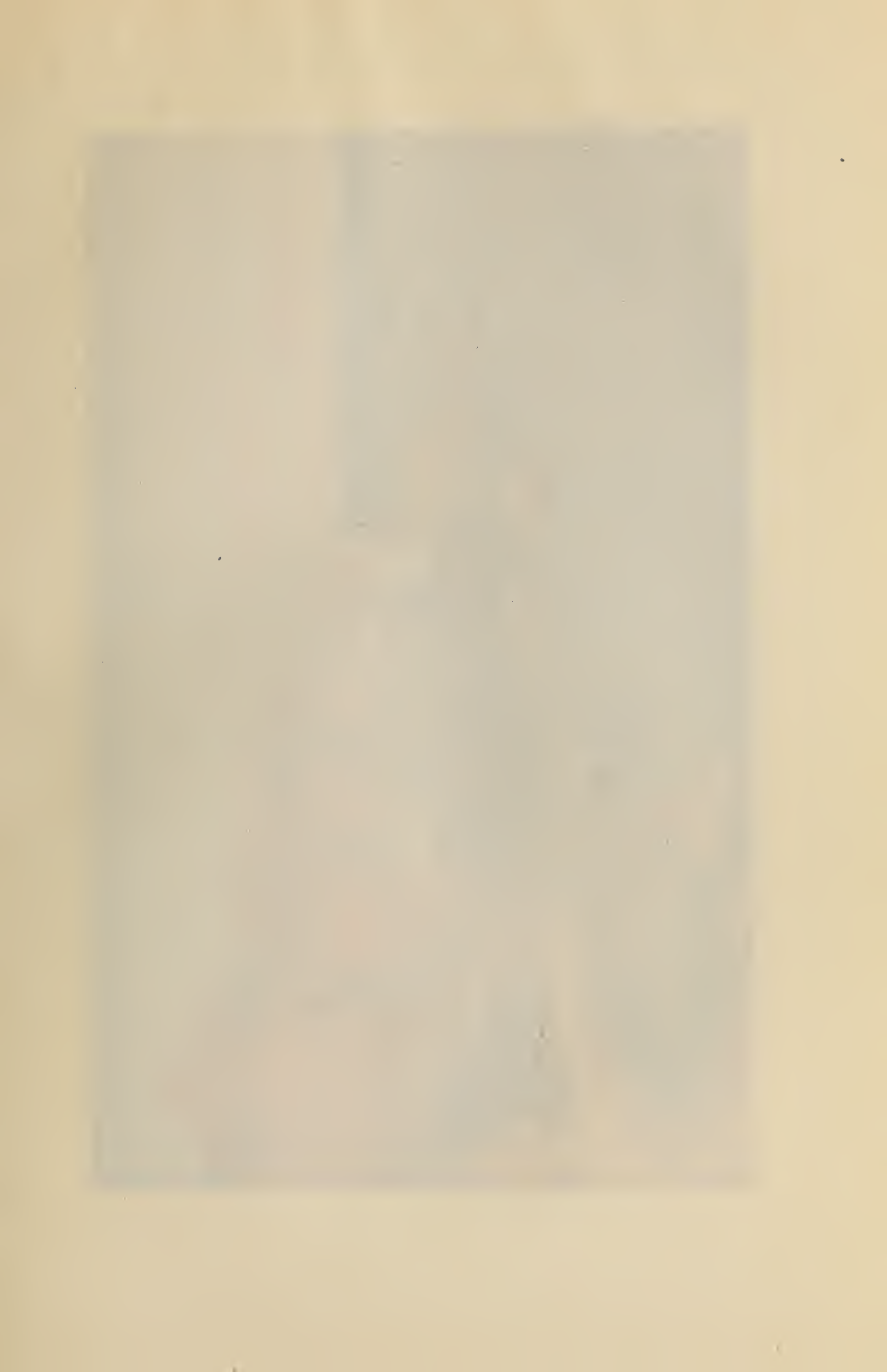
But it is in Beyrout above all other places that the blend is obvious and characteristic. It has been described as "a quarter Syrian, a quarter Turkish, a quarter cosmopolitan, and a quarter nondescript—altogether too cosmopolitan to be otherwise interesting." Its physical appearance, indeed, is surpassingly beautiful. Where Phoenician galleys once lay at anchor, the great steamers of half-a-dozen lines — French, Austrian, Russian, or Egyptian—are moored to-day. The huge and beautiful masses of Lebanon, white with snow for half the year, but diversified with black patches of pine or broken with the quaint outlines of villages that nestle far up towards their summits, form a splendid background for the city. The city builds itself up from the water's edge, its red roofs thrown up against much

green of brilliant foliage, and its skyline broken by the dainty minarets of mosques. From the balcony of your hotel, through hanging garlands of acacias, willows, and roses, you see beyond the old grey gate-posts and the decayed buildings of a café that jut out picturesquely into the sea, the white sail of a boat far across the blue, and fleecy clouds sailing high above the snow-clad peaks. Near the water's edge some naked boys are paddling a canoe. Two trees stand out against the blue water, their stems white in sunlight, dark brown in shadow, and clustered round by a slight fret-work of green, while great heavy masses of pink and white blossom hang from them, and swing in the wind.

Beyrout represents the ancient Berytus,[1] though that town stood at the mouth of the Beyrout River, where there is now but a straggling suburb of the modern town lying along the shore of the bay. To the south stretch long avenues of pine-trees, dark green, rising from a rich ruddy sand, while inland from the shore the city stretches its long environs right to the foot of Lebanon. It was one of the chain of cities built by the Phoenicians along the coast, at equal distances of a day's march apart—Aradus, Byblus, Berytus, Sidon, and Tyre. Tradition attributes its building to the god El, who built Byblus on the same day.[2] "It was," says M. Reclus, quoting an ancient authority, "the first

[1] The name is understood to be a Latinised form of the Hebrew *Beeroth* = Wells.

[2] Lenormant, *Exploration*, June 15, 1885.



AT BEYROUT





city whose appearance Time, created along with it, had witnessed on the earth ; it is the root of life, the nurse of cities, the primitive queen of the world."[1] In Justinian's time it was famous for its schools of law, and the story of St. George, the hero and martyr, has given it a peculiar association with early Christian days. There is little in the modern city to suggest its ancient greatness. It is large, and evidently represents much wealth. But there is here even more than the usual jostling of costly and sordid building which characterises all such cities, and the streets sprawl at awkward angles across the heights and hollows, from one open space to the next. Very different is the impression which waits the traveller who will visit the Dog River, some seven or eight miles distant. There, where the valley opens to the sea, there are Assyrian and Egyptian tablets sculptured in the face of the rock, some of which record invasions of more than three thousand years ago. Intruding upon these is a record of a French expedition under Napoleon III., inscribed upon the panel of an ancient Egyptian monument.

Thus, even in the testimony of the rocks, does the ancient East suffer the intrusion of the modern West. Of more recent events there are not wanting some which heighten the impression. Somewhere beneath these waves dancing now in the sunlight, lies the wreck

[1] *Nouvelle Géographie Universelle*, ix. 777. The Roman colony of Berytus was founded by Agrippa in 14 B.C., probably in fulfilment of a plan formed by Julius Caesar, to be the bridle of the Lebanon, as Heliopolis (Baalbek) was the bridle of Antilibanus.

of the *Victoria*, which sank within sight of this shore but a few years ago. Here, as elsewhere in the Lebanon, men are met who date all recent events from 1860, the year of the great massacre, when the Mohammedans of those parts rose to exterminate the Christians. Near the railway station there is still a multitude of disused *diligences* that were once the most modern and up-to-date properties of the city, carrying passengers by road to Damascus, and among them are innumerable ice-waggons, formerly used for bringing to the hot inhabitants loads of snow from Hermon. These too are of the past, superseded by the Beyrout ice-factory. In Damascus, at the other end of the road, the old world is still so supreme as to be hardly aware of the encroaching new : in Beyrout the two jostle each other at every corner, and, although the centuries appear to be mixed up in a kind of solemn confusion, yet there is no question that the new world holds the crown of the causeway.

Beyrout has often been quoted as the seat of a quite phenomenal amount and variety of missionary enterprise. From the sweet and childlike simplicity of the Annie Taylor Orphanage to the extraordinarily modern enterprise and equipment of the American College ; from the Quaker village-schools to the high-walled Jesuit convent, all are here. It is no part of our present purpose to estimate the effect of these establishments upon that composite life in which the blend of East and West is now resulting. They are being worked with self-sacrificing devotion, in full consciousness of the

peculiar difficulties of the situation, and every one who studies their work intelligently must honour it. Yet most of its results are necessarily out of sight. Probably of all the missions it is true that their most valuable and effective work is that of leavening the masses of Oriental life with that strong leaven of Christian faith and principle which will one day appear in its ultimate result when the time is ripe.

The streets of Beyrout on a Sunday afternoon present the most amazing phantasmagoria of the meeting of the ends of the earth. Much of the old life is there still, and between the bright-coloured groups of men and women on the house-tops there is many an alley up which you may see veiled women in black and white smoking narghilis, and refreshing themselves with those pink and yellow sherbets which are still so popular. Here is a fat, elderly man in rusty European clothes, mounted for a giddy moment on a flying donkey, which will presently precipitate him into a rubbish heap, and then stand still to watch his discomfiture. There, the street is blocked beyond all possibility of passing by a mass of laden camels. Walk down the long street of the Meidan to the site of the ancient town at the bridge, and you find yourself in a procession of open carriages, filled with young men in bowler hats, firing crackers and pistols as they drive along. As they pass you may hear them shouting at a party of three grave men in long black robes and with purple-white turbans, or exchanging curses with Arab shepherds clad in loose abbas of brown and dark magenta, driving

their sheep that way with dogs. Here is an aged priest taking his half-dozen scholars out for a walk, clad in straw hats, white trousers, and black jackets, along streets where these fashions are but of yesterday, and where there still gleam the rich silks of men's robes, lemon and saffron-coloured. At least we can all boast that we dress our parts here. There is no chance of mistaking any one for any one else. As well might you mistake a missionary for a dervish as an Arab shepherd for a westernised Levantine of Beyrout.

From the docks, highly scented with the aroma of various woods cut and piled in the sun, you may wind your way into the heart of the thickest native centre of the city. The clean smell of the wood is soon exchanged for other odours. Strong-smelling cooked dishes full of oil and onions greet your nostrils, and a heavy scent of arrak seems to hang always in the air, for it is only here and there that even the Mohammedans of the Levant have remained abstainers from alcohol. All sorts of lethal sweetmeats and much unclean snow from the hills are exposed for sale ; and one poor wretch, too low down even to make his wares presentable by removing the dirt from them, is trying to sell untempting nuts on a tray, and calling aloud that he is very poor.

Here a marriage party is conducting the bridegroom, seated on a horse and looking very foolish, but determinedly keeping up the solemnity of the occasion. Women are singing and lads are firing pistols, while one guest, with spasmodic leapings, is



A DRUZE BRIDE





beating a tambourine. Behind them follows a double line of women, presumably relations of the bridegroom, who wail and squeal aloud in a sustained epithalamium, until your horse grows restive and threatens to turn their dancing into mourning. Cabmen are quarrelling over their fares, and vendors of Stamboulis—those cakes of strange design—are shouting out their goods, while even in the finest streets the smells from the kennel are appalling.

Indoors, the favourite type of furnishing is in magenta-coloured silk or satin, and the pictures on the walls are of the type of art familiar on the biscuit tins of the West. In your hotel you are visited in your bedroom by an olive-complexioned barber with his box of instruments and cooling scented essences. At the table you sit between a Moslem who rejects dish after dish, and dines on vegetables, and a party of Americans discussing Mr. Bryan's latest speech. For here, when the streets are resounding with firearms and gay with flags in honour of the Prophet's birthday, the American statesman is addressing an audience representing all the Orient in the American College. X-rays are here, for the cure of lupus, kodaks and all their accessories, freemasonry making the whole world kin, and these are all mingled with constant reminders of a society ancient as the world.

To estimate the blend aright, one must have lived long amid such scenes. All that the passing traveller sees is but the outward appearance, and it must be confessed that it is neither attractive nor promising. Many

of the men have but one eye, the other having been destroyed by their mothers in childhood to avoid the conscription.[1] Even among those whose natural features are intact and even comely there is something unpleasing in the aspect of many of the men and women. It is in dress that one sees most clearly and most painfully this compromise between East and West. In their native dress, it has been well said of the Syrians that "they group themselves superbly, and wear their clothes so well." But for some occult reason they cannot look even tolerably presentable in European clothes, and yet they are bent on using them. "Paris fashions," is the cry of this deluded land, at the call of which the girls, heavily painted, with short frocks and open-work stockings, with unspeakably gaudy dresses, and hats that neither tongue nor pen can describe, have transformed themselves from one of the finest spectacles in the world to the appearance of a ballet strayed by accident into the daylight. The lads have as a rule preserved the *tarbush*, the red fez which lights up an Eastern crowd so brightly; but that, itself a modern importation, is all that remains of the older ways. The gaily cut trousers and the heavy scent that lingers behind those dandies after they have passed tell of a vulgarised and impoverished spirit.

It is to be feared that the Eastern vices remain beneath the thin veneer of Western civilisation, and

[1] This was an ancient device, so common in the fourth century that it had to be checked by the most cruel punishments. Cf. Dill, *Roman Society in the Last Century of the Western Empire*, p. 196.



OUTDOOR RESTAURANT





have in some cases at least but exploited the West for refinements of indulgence. And whereas the sins of the earlier East were frank and unashamed, the sins of the Levant lack even the appearance of any greatness about them. Certainly the manners which have in many cases resulted from the blend could hardly be worse or more disagreeable. The vanity, selfishness, and insolence of this cross-bred generation are open and apparently quite unconscious of their ugliness. Those who are educated—and the Levantine is not without cleverness—force upon one the inevitable question whether the Syrian, speaking Arabic only, but speaking it with courteous words, was not a nobler type of humanity than this descendant of his who has learned to speak impertinently in Arabic, French, and English.

The change is felt and regretted by many of the Syrians themselves. There is a fine story of a young Arab who was told of the coming railway which would take people from Damascus to Bagdad in a day. Stung with jealousy and anger, he replied that his grandfather had an Arab stallion on which he used to make that journey in one night. In Beyrout not a few of the older men lament the change. Walking with one of them, the writer pointed to a group of lads and girls such as has been described above, and asked him why they had exchanged the nobler costume of the past for that. "Ah!" he replied, "do you know that the Arabs call the raven the *crooked walker*? The raven once hopped gracefully like a bird. One day it saw a

gazelle, and began at once to try to walk like the gazelle. Now it walks as you see—neither like one nor the other. And that is what these are—crooked walkers."

If the foregoing is a correct impression of the present blend of East and West as contrasted with the better one of ancient days, it is impossible for any thoughtful person not to ask how such a difference can be accounted for. Probably the answer would show that a change has come upon the spirit both of West and East.

The West has grown familiar with Oriental things, and lost its surprise, and with wonder has vanished appreciation. It has lost its desire to be in any respect instructed and its willingness to receive. It is not enough to us to be either indignant, or benevolent, or enterprising when we go Eastwards as politicians or missionaries or commercial adventurers. The ancient visitors were more reverent to the mysticism of the lands they came to ; they had a feeling for the poetry, the dream, and the idealism which they found, and some of these they brought home with them. Even the Westerns of the Graeco-Roman period had this feeling, as we shall see in a later chapter. Drunk with the sun, they were at least inspired to dreams of great things in stone, and to some lingering hope of an answer to their cry from above. Now (with, of course, many notable exceptions) it is a less wistful West that visits Baalbek and Beyrout, and consequently less sympathetic. When Aurelian after the siege of Palmyra

erected his temple of Belus in Rome, it was not felt to be out of place there. But in Hyde Park the Sphinx itself would look absurd and grandiose, as the Needle looks pathetically alien on the Embankment. Our danger is in that loss of sympathy and reverence. The late Professor Masson[1] has pointed out that centuries of activity without contemplation are bad even for the devil, and have transformed Milton's princely figure of Satan into the merely mischievous cleverness of Goethe's Mephistopheles. So, perhaps, we have lost the idealistic qualities that might make our contact with the East like that of the ancients in its finer results. Even when we attempt such idealism we fail—witness the wreath at the tomb of Saladin[2] and the monument beneath its wire-cage in the Bacchus temple of Baalbek. Kinglake in his *Eothen* speaks of the magic spell that comes alike upon "the calculating merchant, the inquisitive traveller, and the post-captain, with his bright, wakeful eye of command."[3] It is precisely that magic spell whose absence is but too clearly noticeable to-day.

A change has also come upon the spirit of the East. When it met the West of old, it was either at a time living with fresh vitality, or in the conservative immovableness of its unchanging repose. Now, it is in neither of these conditions. The Syrian East is consenting to change, but without any original spring of vitality. For many centuries it has remained unmoved. The Arab, proud and aloof, saw and despised

[1] *The Three Devils.* [2] p. 128. [3] *Eothen*, chap. viii.

the fringes of Western civilisation.[1] Perfectly self-satisfied, he rode off again without touching them to his congenial desert, and the only differences in the tents between our day and that of Abraham are gun-powder, tobacco, and coffee. But at last commerce, luxury, and convenience have tempted the East, and she is falling before them. She has awakened from her dream, but not to any new inspiration. Rather has she awakened to all manner of machines and utilities, pleasures and fashions and ambitions of place and money. Holding lightly by her ancient and proper ideals, she is now in the act of exchanging old lamps for new.

As to the future history of those regions, he would be bold who would venture upon any prophecy to-day. Apart from politics altogether, there can be no question that the Nearer East is now opening itself to the West and calling it, and that the West is coming willingly. Of course this is in part a matter merely of exploitation, a venture of imperial or commercial enterprise. But it is not all to be explained away in this fashion. The burden of the sorrows and the needs, the missed opportunities, and the immense and pitiful waste that has come upon these lands, once famous and happy, is a very genuine burden upon the heart and conscience of the West.[2] If the European nations would lay aside their mutual suspicions, and put their

[1] *Asia and Europe*, 307.

[2] Cf. a remarkable article on the Bagdad Railway in the *Edinburgh Review*, October 1907.

energies into the problem in a trustful and disinterested spirit, much might yet be done towards a satisfactory solution.

As a matter of fact, the dreaming East, with its arrested progress and its long story of sorrows and of wrongs, is now actually touching our Western spirit and feeling all the rush and fury of its energy. If as yet at the points of contact there are to be found many instances of a mistaken and harmful blending, that cannot alter the fact that over all the field there is the chance of a mutual enrichment instead of impoverishment. The blend that is now threatening is wrong in virtue of its false method of imitation. The Europeanisation of Asia is but an extreme instance of that tendency to merge all individual types in one neutral and commonplace average, against which Mr. Yeates and his friends of the Celtic League are fighting in Ireland. In regard to this, Matthew Arnold's words in his *Celtic Literature* are worth remembering: "My brother Saxons have, as is well known, a terrible way with them of wanting to improve everything but themselves off the face of the earth; I have no such passion for finding nothing but myself everywhere; I like variety. . . ."[1] It would be certainly a poor result of all that has come and gone, if a traveller alighting in the lands that surround the Mediterranean, could ultimately form no conclusion as to what country he had reached except by the contour of the land and the conspicuous public

[1] *Celtic Literature*, p. 14.

buildings. The world will be irretrievably impoverished in the day when the East loses its Orientalism.

The gifts of the West are many—gifts of science, industry, agriculture, which might speedily restore any ruined land to smiling prosperity. The immense corn revenues of ancient Syria and Mesopotamia, and the mineral wealth which is already discovered, though as yet but little touched, are alone sufficient to guarantee the future. The railways which have been or are being constructed will be the greatest means of opening up these avenues. Yet it would appear that even the railway must be comparatively useless until there is a nobler change of spirit than that which we have been describing. In place of the old idle dreaming and age-long *laissez faire*, or the new vanity and self-indulgence, there must be a spirit of steadiness and energy, attention to the duty of the hour, and faithfulness to the enterprise or the bargain undertaken. To secure these a better system of government must be introduced, with law and order instead of passion and impulse for its main principles. These also are the gifts of the West, and the East must ultimately accept them if she is to be saved, not because they are Western, but because they are the only possible ways of successfully managing human affairs. The younger Turkish party knows this quite well. It has seen in Europe, in America, and in Egypt, the beneficial results of steady government, and the reserves of power and knowledge which can be brought to the development

of a land. Should such counsels prevail[1]—and sooner or later they must prevail—the great problem will be to keep these new benefits from extinguishing the gift of dreaming and the sense of beauty in the renovated lands, and exchanging their precarious romance for a prosperous and dull respectability. One is loth to believe that the dream and the beauty can subsist only in conjunction with ruinous industrial conditions and impossible moral standards.

On the other hand, in any right contact, the West as well as the East must receive. The greatest danger here is commercialism, which is the motive of much of our travel eastwards. Certain it is that our life is too hard driven. America is already in danger of nervous prostration, and Europe is sorely in need of rest. If we would but open our hearts to the gifts which the East has to give us—to the value of thought and beauty for their own sakes and apart from any further practical utility, to the value of reverence and to the value of peace—we might find them just that which is needed to calm the heightening fever of our Western life, and to save us from perishing of commercialism.

[1] When these sentences were written nothing would have appeared more incredible than that, while they were yet in proof, the demand for a Constitution would have been made and granted at Constantinople.

CHAPTER II

ACROSS LEBANON

The view of Lebanon from the sea is one of the most imposing in the world. The mountains rise sheer from the water's edge, except at a few points like Beyrout and Tripoli, whose level promontories give room for cities west of their foot-hills, and along some strips of narrow seaboard plain like that of Sidon. Beyond that, for us as for King Richard's ships, "a dim coast, veiled in violet, lifted before their eyes—mountain ranges, great hollows, clouded places, so far and silent, so mysteriously wrapt, full of awe."[1] The skyline is bold and imposing—a lofty sweeping contour, so high and yet apparently so near that one might expect beneath it a succession of sheer precipices. Yet in reality that skyline is but the edge of a wide expanse of rolling hills piled high in the mountain-range, with countless fair valleys and pleasant villages nestling in them or perched upon the heights. We had intended much wandering in this lofty and singularly beautiful region, but found it necessary to reduce our acquaint-

[1] Hewlett, *Richard Yea-and-Nay*, bk. ii. chap. iii.



A DRUZE WOMAN





ance with the ranges to two journeys across them, one by rail and a second on horseback. Such meagre information as these journeys afford is altogether insufficient for an adequate conception of a region whose geography and whose history alike are so spacious and full of interest. No resource is left us except the simple one which we shall follow, of describing the two journeys in some detail. Yet even so, we shall find some things interesting in themselves, and still more interesting in their suggestions.

The history of Lebanon would require many volumes. From the ancient Phoenician days, when the seaboard towns derived much of their wealth from the cedars on the hills, on through the turbulent centuries, race after race of highlanders maintained their precarious freedom and played their parts—ever picturesque and sometimes far-reaching in their effects—in history. The secrets of Druze and Assassin are known to their recesses, and the glamour of hidden beauties and terrors. The wine of Lebanon is strong, and its silks are of great repute; but its history is heady as the one and brilliant as the other. An air of romance floats over it for the dreamer, and there is many a knotty problem for the historian. The two seem to intermingle there, and men write of the region as in a trance, in which no reader can say where history ends and dream begins.

No part of Syria has, during the past hundred years, been so peculiar a meeting-ground of East and West. The conquest by Mohammed Ali and his

famous son Ibrahim Pasha, rulers of Egypt who had risen against the Turk, led to the revolt of 1840 and the appearance of England and Austria upon the scene. In 1860 came the terrible massacre in which 14,000 Christians perished in Syria, the Druzes of the Lebanon falling everywhere upon the Maronites. France intervened with 10,000 troops, and since then Lebanon, south of Tripoli, has been an independent district, between that of Beyrout on the one hand and Damascus on the other, administered by a Christian governor-general. Since 1860 the Druzes, formerly fierce against all comers, have been friendly to Europeans ; but they themselves were at that time for the most part driven from the Lebanon, and the Druze Mountain, which is now their home, is far to the east of Damascus.[1] It is said that of late many Mohammedans have sought Christian baptism for their children in Lebanon. This, indeed, may indicate nothing more than a desire to leave not even the remotest chance of help untried in a desperate strait, and they deny afterwards that the rite has made the child a Christian. Even the Druzes will tell you that they are Christians, but this is not true, and it is probable that no stranger really knows the mysteries of the Druze faith. Yet these facts are significant of the amount and potency of Western influence in the Lebanon.

The tide of Western influence has not kept itself within the political boundaries. Its contour line runs

[1] Cf. Miss Bell's *The Desert and the Sown.*

along the crest of the mountains from north to south. It is true that, in a thin stream, it has penetrated from West to East along the line of railway. But as you stand upon the crest of the watershed, the division of the land is marked as in a map with colours. To the east the villages are of brown mud and rubble—poor to a wonder, and lying low along the ground. Westwards all is different, the rolling mountain landscape being everywhere dotted with red-roofed villages, whose splashes of bright colour shine from out their surrounding green, and tell of the advancing West. This side, western both in direction and in character, covers by far the larger and more interesting area. Many rivers rise in its high and narrow valleys, that lie between the main range and smaller parallel ranges, or in wide hollows like amphitheatres held up some 5000 or 6000 feet above sea-level. The rivers bend westwards, and cut their way to the sea through narrow and picturesque gorges in the lower spurs. Countless villages nestle on this side the watershed. The eastern side falls in its southern part abruptly to the Bikā, the valley of Coelesyria, though in the northern region there is much foot-hill country affording sites for the brown villages already mentioned.

The railway journey from Beyrout across the mountains is one in many respects memorable. The variety of types among one's fellow-passengers is of itself sufficient to awaken no common interest. Uniform is very common, and in many cases it is strikingly picturesque. The soldiers of the Lebanon, and

the kavasses of the Consuls, vie with one another in brilliance of embroidery, while the guard of the train, clinging to the hand-rails outside the carriages, strides back and forward along the footboard, "clothed with the beauty of a thousand stars." The barbaric splendour of the uniforms, and the constant recurrence of them, suggest more than the mountaineer's love of colour. Life is still rather cheap in this part of the world, and authority apparently feels it necessary to be much in evidence.

Many of one's fellow-travellers are able to converse in broken French, and they are not long in making themselves familiar. There is no sense of any man having a private right in his own affairs, and the unashamed publicity of the life they all lead is at once apparent. The gentleman on your right is not, as you might have imagined, a brigand in mufti. He is an engineer who has laid down some part of a Syrian railway, and he at once falls upon you with a hundred questions regarding the contour map you are studying. The gentleman on your left is a merchant, and before he has done with you he will have ascertained the exact price you paid for your kodak, your aneroid, watch, chain, hat, and boots. The elderly and somewhat rawboned person opposite, on whom his black velvet vest with great buttons sits badly, and whose neck his white collar obviously irritates, is consumed with the desire to know your name, and your friend's name, and your country, and your religion, and the precise shade of your religion. In order the more readily to elicit

these important details of information, he volunteers the one fact—certainly a remarkable one—that he has himself been in Manchester, and found it "*très joli.*" So the time passes, in spite of the clocks in the railway stations, every one of which records it according to its own reckoning, and without regard to the views of any other clock. At Reyak you all scramble to the restaurant for lunch. Wine is included, but if the waiter is not satisfied with his tip he will follow you across the rails demanding payment for the wine consumed, and when that ruse fails he will declare that the coins you paid him in are bad money. Even the guard of the train has ways of his own of increasing the legitimate revenue. We had not long started from Beyrout when that official reached our window along the footboard, and, filling up its open space with his magnificent chest, informed us that a woman and her son—poor people, and mad to boot—had been discovered on the train without a ticket. For them he was collecting money in his handkerchief that they might not have to be ejected. So, with a growing weight of coins in the handkerchief, he disappeared, with his khaki uniform and rhinoceros-hide riding-whip, and bright metal ornaments that jingled as he went. But it is to be feared that the poor ones were travelling with season tickets, for the thing had happened before.

The railway, a narrow-gauge rack-and-pinion one, begins its long ascent soon after leaving the outskirts of Beyrout. As you ascend, you have little attention to spare for the scenery in the immediate neighbourhood

of the line, so fascinating is the backward view of the sea, blue and golden in the sunlight, with the green and red city for foreground, flanked by a long stretch of dark pine woods whose sombre green throws into strong contrast the orange-red sand. This, however, is soon lost to sight, and the hills show wonderful varieties of striation, bent and twisted intricately and set up in precipitous slices of sheer precipice as if for show. Elsewhere, the limestone builds itself up in natural terraces like those of Jacob's Ladder at Bethel, which resemble huge semicircular staircases built for the feet of giants. Here and there masses of beetling crag are seen, like the work of ancient fortification, but on a Titanic scale—"grand castellated rocks whose bluish-grey sides are beautifully fluted by the frosts and rains." The colours are faint for the most part, washed-out masses of greyish-green and brown. That is in sunshine; but in shadow, when some broad cloud sails across them, they darken to rich and full tones. The larger masses of rock are set up with sufficiently broad surfaces to catch the shadows in great fields of wonderfully rich and harmonious colour.

There is much terracing for the cultivation of several different varieties of plants. Wheat grows to the height of 6000 feet above the sea, and the terraced patches of it remind one of Norwegian agriculture. In this land of monstrous taxation, wheat is but lightly taxed, and the threshing-floors are exempt from taxation.[1] Mulberries are grown along the sea coast,

[1] It is baked into bread which may be bought at most of the stations.





A DRUZE SHEIKH





and on the lower slopes of the mountains, where, amid the terraces, large silk factories cling to the hillside, with chimneys smoking for the busy looms within. Olives reach a higher altitude, and form the staple food of the poor. As the camel among animals, so is the olive among plants. Its leaves afford a grateful shade in the heat ; its fruit is food of which he who has once acquired its taste will never tire ; the oil extracted both from fruit and stones when crushed is useful for food, for light, and (in former times) for soap as well ; while the crushed stones still have their value, supplementing the dried dung and roots of poplar as fuel.

On the heights, at a far greater altitude than either mulberry or olive grow, the hillsides are covered with vineyards. The pruned vine-trunks, several feet in length, were lying along the ground when we crossed the mountain, for the time had not yet come to erect them and prop them for the new season's fruit-bearing. Strong and hardy plants they look, and the reason is worth recording. Round the stem the vine-dressers dig out the earth to the depth of a foot or two, and cut off all the upper roots. If that were not done, the sun would scorch these surface-roots, or the passing plough would bleed them, while the deeper roots are safe from both. At Stora the accumulation of casks at the railway

It is thin as paper, and is made by women, who toss the cake of dough from hand to hand with a peculiar waving motion requiring much skill. Then the flattened cake is flung upon a cushion, and from the cushion transferred to a plate of flat iron on which it is fired.

station tells of the presence of a great wine-farming establishment carried on by the Jesuits, who ripen their wine in tunnels excavated under the hillside. Near the vineyards, and indeed on every piece of cultivated land in these mountains, closely planted groves of poplars are seen, grown for building purposes, and especially for the roofs of houses.

The railway follows for the greater part of the way the line of the old road, which is still populous with a procession of Eastern travellers on beasts of many kinds. When we crossed by it on April 10, 1906, there had been a late snowfall, and for a time the line had been blocked. Near the summit, where the railway reaches a height of nearly 4500 feet, the mountains were deep in snow, and presented a very wild and Alpine scene. The natives were eating snow in handfuls, and cisterns had been filled with it for summer use. During all but a few months of summer the higher regions are snow-covered, and even through the heats masses of snow linger in the clefts and hollows. The highest summits are those near the famous cedar grove, and their heights are slightly over 10,000 feet. But by far the finest and most commanding mountain of the range is Jebel Sannin, a shapely and far-seen peak some twenty miles east from Beyrout. Its height is 8557 feet, and it dominates the northern view as Hermon does the south and east. Among these heights the air is keen and invigorating, and along the line of railway the loftier villages have now become famous health-resorts, to which crowds of people flock

in summer, not from the sweltering heat of Beyrout only, but from Egypt and other lands. At Sofar, near the summit of the line, there is a huge hotel, which was built some years ago when the franchise of Monte Carlo was threatened, but which has escaped the honour of degrading the snows of Lebanon to the service of the poorest vice in Europe.

The second journey is from several points of view a more interesting one than the first. It is the three days' journey from Baalbek to the Cedars and back. It is true that the conditions under which we made this journey were unusual. Late snow had blocked the pass of *El Arz*, the Cedar Mountain, and only one man had crossed it before us that season—or was supposed to have crossed it, for the fact was reiterated with sinister emphasis that no word had reached Baalbek of his arrival anywhere on the farther side. Yet the journey has been made many times every year under all varieties of conditions, and when the snow has melted the pass is regularly crossed by horses. As a typical piece of Lebanon scenery, it is perhaps permissible to add yet another to the many descriptions already given.

The crest of the range of Lebanon, running north and south, with a decided slant to eastward, follows the coast-line of Syria at a distance of from ten to twenty miles inland from a point somewhat south of Sidon to the Lake of Homs. This range is in three divisions. The southmost, which runs from the southern extremity to the Beyrout-Damascus railway line, falls sheer into

the Litany valley, with steep and unbroken wall of mountain on the east, that allows of no foot-hills whatsoever. From the railway line northward for some twenty miles, the ridge is broken by the huge and contorted masses of the group of mountains that culminate in the lordly peak of Jebel Sannin. Thence northward, almost to the end of the range, there is a double crest, the first mountain wall from the watershed falling eastward to a high valley, studded with lakes, well watered, and richly cultivated. This valley is flanked by a varied and very beautiful system of foot-hills on the east, which rise tumultuously from the Plain of Coelesyria, and hold up this long, green valley at the height of some 4000 feet above the sea. The route which we are now to follow is chiefly interesting because it cuts across this lofty valley of little lakes and shows us Eastern Lebanon in its greatest breadth.

At Baalbek we hired a guide—a young man who professed the Christian faith, and adorned its doctrine at least in point of interest and originality. He provided the food, mainly consisting of cooked quail and bread ; he also found the horses—bony, small, and strong beasts, furnished with those fantastic Arab saddles which appear to the unsophisticated to have been built for the especial service of bow-legged persons. He himself, Arab as to his head, and very much of the European city clerk as to his body and legs, swung a double-barrelled fowling-piece across his back, and started off, under the admiring eyes of his sister, like a second Alexander the Great. Like many another

great man, James (which name will serve our purpose as well as his right one) was subject to moods. Yesterday he was a smiling and fawning Syrian, a mere characterless bundle of ancient European clothes; to-day, with knit brows, he starts the cavalcade as Henry V. would have his soldiers fight, "lending the eye a terrible aspect." Now he is full of hope, promises, and boastings; then, having lost his way, he is dissolved in tears. Again, he is serious and pathetic about the hard life a Christian leads in Baalbek; then, seduced by the accompanying soldier, and dazzled with visions of pleasure in Beyrout, he is for deserting, or carrying us all to the coast. Again, after an angry scene in which his perfidy is rebuked, he becomes suddenly a little child, and vows eternal fidelity to us his friends, begs to be taken without wages to England as our servant, hopes only that our wives will offer no objection to his remaining in our houses for ever. Yet again, at the close of the journey, he sits weeping in his house-door, on the pretence of having lost a napoleon of his wages, and refuses to be comforted except by coin. Finally, he appears at the railway station with his mouth full of blessings and his eyes of laughter. On the whole, James is the Eastern Question in epitome—with plenty of human nature and decency at the heart of him, and a veritable network of lies encasing it, all seen through a succession of changeful moods like the weather of an April day.

So we started, winding our way out of Baalbek by narrow lanes among the green of its environs, and saw

the mighty ruins rise visibly before our eyes upon their colossal platform, as we receded from them to the westward across the plain. Soon all the miserable houses of the modern village disappear, and the temples only remain, commanding the valley. The soil of the broad plain we are crossing is red, the colour of terra-cotta and of claret. Along the hillside in front, and still several miles away, there is a dark crimson splash like blood, varying the greyish-brown and rich green of the foot-hills. Above tower the snows of the higher ranges beyond the high valley, with a wonderful spectacle of silvery clouds forming and vanishing on the highest peaks. Few of the dwellers in the plain trouble themselves about the mountains, to which they lift their eyes but seldom. "It will be cold up there," says one, shrugging his shoulders; and another, hearing that it is the Cedars we are bound for, encourages us with a melancholy hope that we shall come back alive.

The horses were good from the first, with an occasional kick in them which once or twice came near an accident. They climbed nimbly, and the keen air and sunshine seemed to exhilarate them as well as their riders. Immediately beyond Shelif, a village at the edge of the plain, we found the track winding up a shallow valley, sparsely covered with undergrowth, and leading to a rather entangled region of twisting valleys and tumbled hills. Here James promptly lost his way, and galloped off recklessly to find it. In a few minutes his horse returned riderless, followed at a



AN ARMENIAN GIRL





respectful distance by the *quondam* rider, on whose cheeks there were the marks of tears. Two strange horsemen appeared, brilliant with scarlet saddle-cloths and some relics of the picturesque dress of Lebanon. They and our guide simultaneously unslung their guns, and set them across their knees with a kind of "prepare-to-receive-cavalry" air—only, of course, to discover immediately that they were old acquaintances. This play of obviously unreal tragedy seems essential to the Syrian mind, and one soon comes to watch it without any anticipation of a speedy and violent end. After climbing over two or three successive spurs and little valleys, we settled down to a laborious but business-like pathway, which zigzagged in a painful and conscientious manner upwards toward the crest. The low trees and bushes were thicker now, and some of the hillsides had the promise of future forests of pines, while everywhere the land was dark with the undergrowth of dwarf holly, box, and juniper.

The villages at the edge of the plain bore all the aspect of smiling prosperity. Camels are about them, and fields cleared of stones and tilled with the help of oxen, and flocks of pigs that proclaim the Christianity of their owners. The leewans of the houses are brightly painted, and the people you meet are pleasant folk to see. Here goes a youth with a small but shining battle-axe, a youth gaily dressed upon small outlay of expense; there some very pretty maidens, going out alone to another mountain village. And they all greet you cheerily as you pass, and go about

the solitudes with confidence, for here women are respected and men are armed. Every here and there mills are built—grey round towers fitted with rough and simple turbine wheels, which the water splashing down from above turns and flows on its way.

But as you ascend, the signs of comfort diminish, and the poverty of the people becomes more and more painfully manifest. There are many black levelled platforms of charcoal-burners, and now and then, turning a corner, you may chance upon a rude Arab tent set up beside a sown patch of hillside. The hamlets, and the little cleared fields beside them, show increasing signs of poverty. Most of these villagers live on maize, not being rich enough to afford barley. The wealthier have a few sheep, and the poorer a goat or two browsing in the neighbourhood.

At last we reached the crest of this eastern range of foot-hills, at the height of 5200 feet above sea-level. The view that broke upon our eyes was one very memorable for its unexpected beauty. We were looking across a green valley to the snow at last. The slopes that rose from the farther side were unbroken by any foot-hills, and seemed to sweep in one clean curve to the summit of the crest ; bare brown below, and then white along the upper part of them all. Far below us lay Lake Yammuneh, the first of that chain of mountain lakes that lie in the long valley between the ranges. Seen from the crest, the lake shines lustrous with a strange and almost metallic peacock-green and blue. It is dotted with little brown islands, which, on

a nearer view, turn out to be mills, set at farther and farther distances into the water, so that one or other of them may still remain in use as the level of the lake falls in autumn droughts. The vivid colour of the lake, its deep seclusion, and its magnificent Alpine background, all conspired to make that view impressive. There is, indeed, an uncanny air about the place, which is heightened by the fact that there is no visible exit for its waters, although two considerable streams are continually pouring their supplies into it. We were not surprised to hear the tale, which appears to have every probability of being true, that underground channels beneath the great crest convey these waters for a distance of eleven miles, when they reappear in the famous fountain of Afka, whence the Adonis river flows to the sea south of Byblus. We were assured that this theory had been tested by red colouring matter thrown into the lake, which reappeared in the western fountain. Zosimus tells of wonders that happened at Afka in the following curious passage :—

There is a place called Aphaca half-way on the road between Heliopolis and Biblus, where there is a temple of Venus of Aphaca. Beside that temple there is a certain lake like an artificial fish-pond. Near the temple and its vicinity a fire, resembling a torch or globe, is seen as often as the assemblies (which meet at stated intervals) are held there, and, indeed, that fire has been seen as lately as in our own times. Whenever they held the assembly they used to bring gifts to the lake in honour of the goddess—gifts made of gold and silver, as well

as webs of linen and cotton and other more costly materials. If it appeared that these gifts had been accepted, the webs were submerged in just the same manner as the heavy articles; while, if they, instead of being accepted, were rejected as worthless, you would see not only the webs floating on the water, but also the things made of gold and silver, and other materials whose nature it is not to rise to the surface but to sink.

Well, the Palmyrenes, when they had assembled with others at the time of the celebration in the year next before that of their ruin, threw into the lake in honour of the goddess gifts, some of which were of gold, others of silver, and others textile, and all of these gifts sank down into the depths. But next year, at the time of the same celebration, all the offerings were seen floating on the surface, the goddess signifying in this way that which was about to take place.[1]

It is probable that Lake Yammuneh may be that referred to by Zosimus, although it would certainly be large for an artificial fish-pond. There is no lake now of any kind near the site of the Venus temple at Afka. Beside Yammuneh there are the ruins of what appears to be an ancient niche, now used as an oil-press, cut in limestone near the village; and certainly there is witchery enough here for anything miraculous to happen. One of the streams which enter the lake bursts full-born from the mountain-side, and falls in a white cataract down the short slope to the margin of the water. Its basin, where it leaves the rock, is a seething cauldron of deep water some eight or nine feet in breadth, and it is a curious fact that here the current is so strong that pebbles thrown

[1] Zosimus, lib. i. cap. 58.

in are never allowed to reach the bottom, but are returned to the surface and swept over the waterfall. The lake is stocked with a peculiar variety of small fish which are considered a delicacy for the table. Taken together, all these facts seem curiously to correspond with and explain the details of Zosimus's imaginary lake at Afka.

We lingered a long while in this exquisite nook, chatted with a Maronite priest at the fountain, and passed on our way through a sleepy village. Presumably this village was Mohammedan, for we met a little girl of five years, closely veiled. At last we left the place, and rode off northward along the centre of the green and fertile valley, which marks the dividing line between the villayets of Damascus and Lebanon. Apparently this also had once been the bed of a lake, and it was, indeed, a very pleasant place, a "happy valley," like Bunyan's riverside, "curiously diversified with lilies." Below, all was fresh light green, the young green of spring. Above, to the west, the hillside rose out of the lush grass, tawny sand that stretched upwards to the snow. The cuckoo was calling all the time, and sweet scent of fruit trees was heavy on the air. All the people we met were friendly, and, Moslem and Christian alike, returned our greetings with smiles of welcome.

After five miles of easy riding on the level we reached Ainata, our destination for that night. It is an insignificant village, of dark brownish-grey little houses, above which stands in commanding ugliness

the square boxlike structure of the yellow Maronite church, somewhat redeemed by its graceful little belfry. Poverty and decay seemed written in every line of the village, and the so-called street along which the road twisted itself among the houses would have been intolerable as a back lane in any English village. We were taken to the priest's house, reported the best in the place. The usual Gothic alcove of the leewan broke the front line in two, giving a deep recess of shadow and open air, flanked by one room on the right and another on the left. The left-hand chamber was given to us. It had windows fitted with wooden shutters instead of glass. The roof was high, and consisted of interwoven branches and stems of poplar upheld by a stout forked tree-stem in the centre. In one corner stood great jars for olives, oil, etc.; and a pile of bags of wool told either that the priest is also a farmer, or that he receives his stipend in kind. On the walls there hung incongruous pictures of the Virgin, in crude drawing and violent colour, together with several more or less faded photographs of ecclesiastics.

The priest's mother was an ancient lady very beautifully dressed in the Lebanon woman's headdress of black and purple, and she, together with a younger woman, who was obviously the mistress of the house, showed us the greatest possible kindness. The hens were ejected, the earthen floor swept, rugs of soft heavy pile were spread, and a low table set for a recumbent meal. Most of the provisions we had taken



MARONITE GIRL OF THE LEBANON





with us ; but the olives, and the long delicious draughts of hot goat's milk were things to remember. Tea and coffee are unheard-of beverages in Ainata, and the food of the people must be plain indeed. The only sight we had of our host was a short visit of ceremony we were invited to pay to him in his chamber across the leewan. He was suffering from a severe attack of malarial fever, and the treatment was what it usually is in these parts. The room was close to suffocation, and it seemed as if half the village population were assembled in it. The fire was burning hotly, and the patient lay in bed with all his clothes on, including his cassock, overcoat, and hat, and the bed-curtains were drawn close about him. Under his pillow lay a copy of the Syriac Liturgy of the Maronite Church, beautifully printed in black and red. We exchanged greetings, and with mutual acknowledgments withdrew speedily to the cooler air of our own lodging.

From first to last, when it became known that one of us was a physician, we were thronged with a crowd of sick folk, who filled the entire leewan, and overflowed into the garden, entering our chamber one by one, and listening in groups at the door to what was going on for others within. Unlike most places in the East, Ainata brought us but few cases of diseases of the eye. The majority of the patients were suffering from chronic malaria and heart-trouble, induced by mountaineering combined with insufficient food. A strange assortment of human beings was that ailing crowd of men and women. The types were very strongly

marked, and all the men might have been brothers and the women sisters, so much did they resemble one another in features. The faces of the men were kindly and gentle faces, though much worn with toil. The women were tall and well-proportioned, with singularly regular and beautiful features, of an almost Madonna-like regularity and repose.

Very curious and infinitely pathetic are the memories of that incessant consultation. One man, after a long examination of his heart, received some tabloids, and had to have it four times explained to him how often and in what manner he was to take them. At last he understood, and after solemnly bending his head in prayer and crossing himself, swallowed two and left the room with strong protestations of gratitude. Some came timidly, others with the bold jangle of a whole armful of silver bracelets. One woman burst in upon us at the meal-time, loudly shouting out her list of symptoms. James, in the leewan, expressed his offence and severely reprehended such unmannerly conduct. But the woman, like her Syro-phoenician sister of old, was not to be baffled. She rose and shut the door, remaining herself inside and continuing her loud complaint. Another entered shyly, first shut and fastened the door, and then sitting humbly on the ground, whispered her tale of sufferings into the doctor's ear. She had to be told that he could only relieve her for the time, but that her illness was beyond curing. This she stoutly refused to believe, and seemed unable to understand. We heard afterwards her shrill argument

with James in the leewan, the latter explaining to her the difference between this English doctor and some of those native healers on whom she had been spending her substance. "Dr. So-and-so and Dr. So-and-so will tell you he will cure you, and get more and more money from you. The English doctor does not want your money. He wants only to cure you and to tell you the truth." But it was unavailing, and she went away bewildered. Meanwhile, every now and then at the open window, there appeared the face of a singularly beautiful girl, with great wild eyes that seemed to flash beneath the stroke of their long upward curling eyelashes. She was a sort of village Madge Wildfire—dumb and very mad—who went about uttering a sort of incantation of inarticulate sounds accompanied by the jingling of many bangles. She was determined to join in the hospitality, by pouring water for us from an earthen jar she carried, and though often driven away always returned again, leaving a picture of her poor tragic face, with its expression between a smile and a menace haunting the open square of the window. Finally, our retreat was saddened by the crowd of disappointed ones who followed us in vain after the last tabloid had been given away.

The views of the snow, which let down along a corry one long fold of white, like the trail of a linen robe, almost to the village, were very wonderful. Half-way down the slope one little fleecy cloud wandered about the snow in a thin veil that seemed constantly to weave and unravel its twisting threads

of silvery mist. It was all that was left of those masses of threatening clouds which we had seen on the previous day, rolling in storm along the crest of Lebanon, while we stood in the fierce heat and light of Baalbek. Seen in the early morning, the snow that faced us took on the personal meaning of the pathway we must climb to the pass. It seemed a smooth track, and there was certainly nothing visible of terraces cut in ice which Hewlett describes as being somewhere in this region. We soon reached the foot of the white ascent—a soldier and another traveller joining our party at Ainata. As we started the sun was rising on the hills, and the snows above us shone rose-coloured, answering the beacon-fire of Hermon, that flamed now against a dim sky. And so we climbed, while Baalbek on its platform stood out at the foot of the Antilibanus, a folded indigo mountain-land with lines of white marking its folds. The plain of Coele-syria, in ever broader and broader stretches, swept out to view below. It was slow work, for the slopes seemed as steep as a house-roof to those of us who were not mountaineers, and it grew slower as the sun's heat increasing melted the hard surface of the snow. But at last the 1500 feet of climbing ended in a narrow saddle-back of smooth white, broken by an outcrop of rocks which afforded shelter from the keen wind. It was a precarious shelter, for the rock takes the sun's heat and diffuses it, so that in its immediate neighbourhood the snow crust often covers a void space, where the snow in contact with the rock has melted. One of

our party, proving too heavy for the bridge, suddenly disappeared, and all that remained visible of him was his head and shoulders. The exhilaration of the mountain wind was great. We were 7700 feet above the sea, and the air that blew across the fields of snow was unbreathed air. The soldier, an unpromising man for a sentimentalist, sang a song of the mountain, of which the recurring note was "Ma salaami ya Jebel," —"Hail to the Mountain."

Yet even at that height the snow was tarnished. Dust had fallen on it, swept by strong winds from the world below. And on the west one caught a vision of that world and could imagine something of the glories of it. From the vast crescent-shaped line of the crest was flung westwards one smooth sheet of snow, as it were hung from the highest crests to north and south, and bellying like a huge sail's hollow in the wind. At the lowest edge of it, breaking the very hem of the sheet, was a splash of blackish green, insignificant in size. That was the cluster of Cedars we had come to see. Below the Cedars many villages were seen, perched brightly on green hills, their red roofs illuminating the landscape as if with lanterns. About them the country lay rich and deep in green—a broken and tumbled land through which one great gorge cleft the foot-hills, and ran out towards Tripoli and the sea.

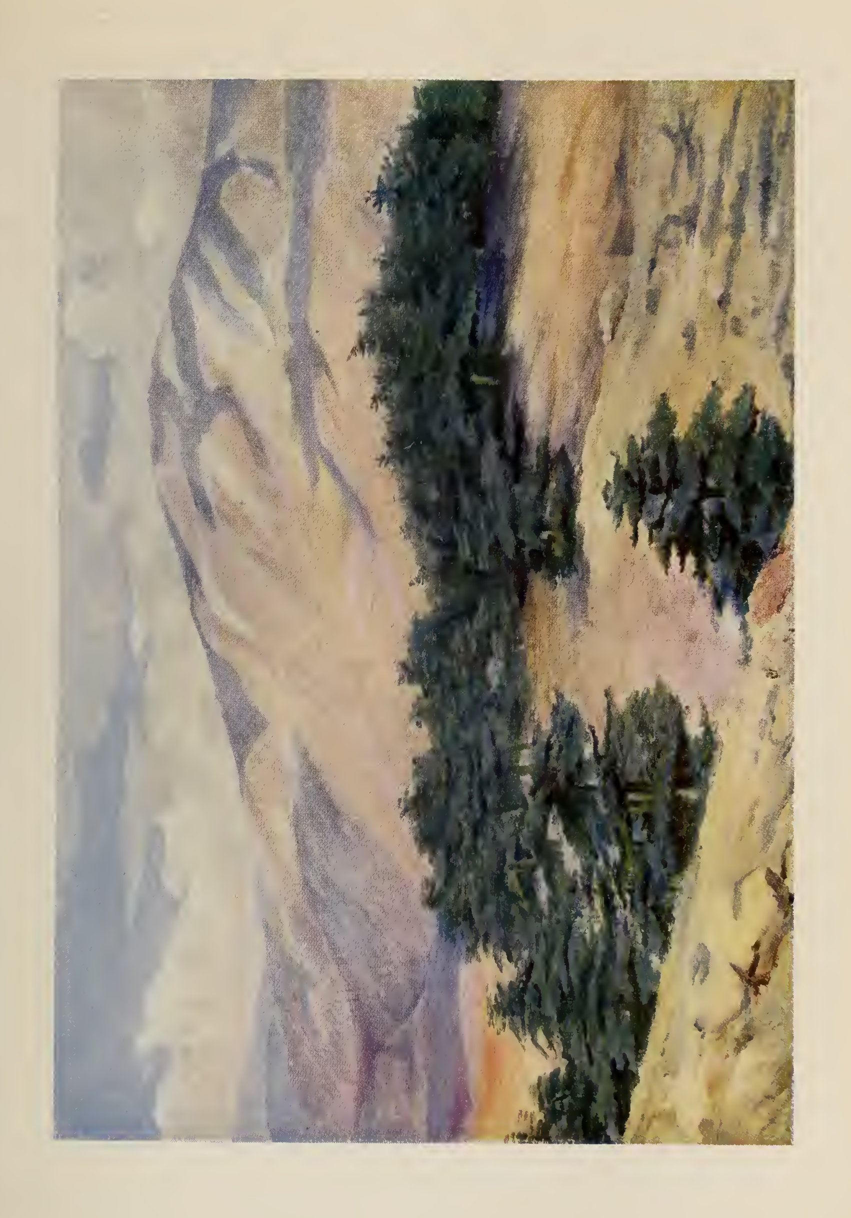
It took us no long time to reach the Cedars, for we partly ran and partly slid down the slope to them. A clear spring near them, cutting its dark channel through

the white, gave us its welcome refreshment, and in a minute or two more we were under the shade of the great trees. They are enclosed by a little low wall, which is somehow or other regarded as a defence against the inroads of wood-cutters, and a lonely little Maronite chapel nestles in their shade. The wood, suddenly reached after so long a tramp across the snow, seemed wonderfully beautiful and refreshing. In the heat of the sun its scent was sweet and strong, and the colour of the green was so dark as to give the impression of far depths and recesses of black shadows like those depicted on the stage in Arabic plays popular in the Levantine and Egyptian theatres.

There are but four hundred trees in this little enclosed wood, though no doubt these are but a last relic of forests that once clothed great stretches of the range. They are of a good height, and their stems have attained, in some instances, a large circumference ; but neither height nor girth are comparable to those of other trees which might be quoted. Indeed, Lebanon is by no means the best place even for cedars, and in other lands this kind of tree attains far greater size and richer life. It is a pitiable descent from these magnificent trees to the poplars and mulberries which are their modern substitutes, yet it would appear that the meaner plants find the soil more congenial to them. Compared with these, the cedar is indeed a lordly tree, and a mountain forest of cedars must have been a thing worthy even of the unmeasured terms in which the ancient Hebrews were wont to describe it. To



GENERAL VIEW OF THE CEDARS AND DEHR EL KODIB



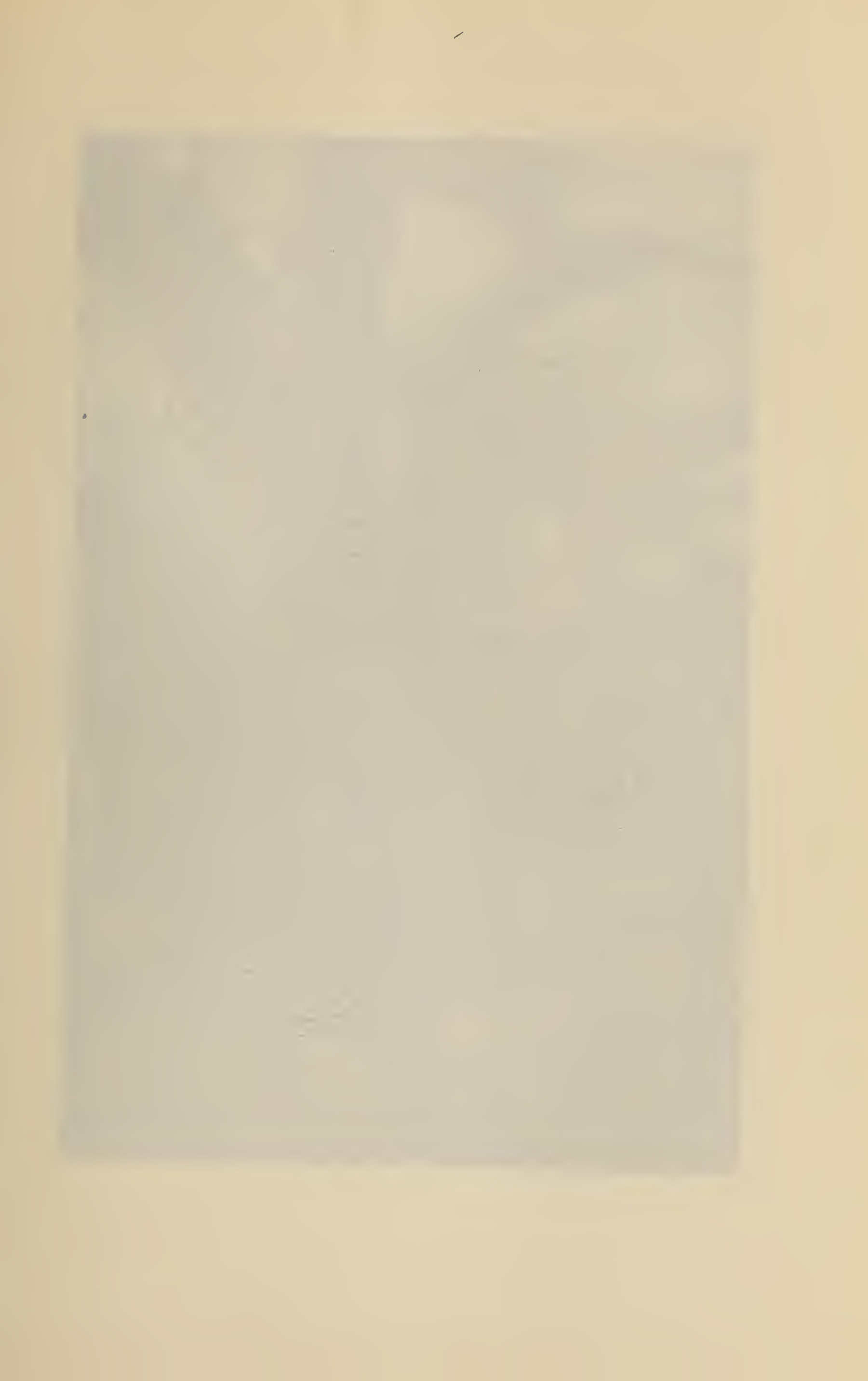


the Jew, as Stanley has said,[1] the cedar was "a portent, an awful work of God." The cedars of Lebanon were spoken of with bated breath as "trees of Jehovah," and there was a kind of religious awe in every mention of them, as of things in some grand and remote way sacramental. It was not only that they were associated with the building of temples and palaces—the masterpieces of Jewish architecture. The cedar was a thing "fair in his greatness," and that combination of beauty and majesty was in itself sufficiently wonderful when contrasted with the poverty in size and form of most of the other trees of Syria. In addition to that, there was the fact of its age that invested it with a claim to reverence which is always honoured in the East. In the grounds of the college at Beyrout we saw a cedar three years old, which was as yet but a foot or so in height. In the grove, on one of the trees, is cut the inscription, GIRAUDIN 1790, and it might have been cut but a few years ago, so far as appearance goes. Years are to these wonderful trees but hours or days of their long career. Successive generations may well pause under their widespread branches, and listen there to the flowing river of the world's history, for the oldest of the veterans count their age not in hundreds but in thousands of years.

It was still early in the day when we started on the return march. The climb to the summit was difficult, for a storm had come down upon the heights, and we followed in each other's deep-sunk footsteps, battered

[1] *Sinai and Palestine*, p. 140.

by a fierce onset of wind, full of hail and rain. The driving mist often kept each traveller apparently isolated, or revealed to him but a ghostly form of his companion in front. But when we reached the summit the air was clear again, and we flew down the western slope on improvised toboggans, made of coats or saddlebags, and covered in fifty minutes a distance which it had taken three and a half hours to climb.



A CEDAR OF LEBANON





CHAPTER III

COELESYRIA AND BAALBEK

The plain of the Bika (anciently known as Coelesyria) lies in a valley, some eighty or ninety miles long, between Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon. In its southern end it widens from the narrow gorge down which the Litany forces its way to the sea. At the north, it opens upon the broader plain of Homs, which the traveller northward sees through the gigantic gates of mountain that end the two ranges there. It is not a level plain, for in the midst of it, some few miles north of Baalbek, you stand upon what is evidently a watershed, and look down upon the long sweep of two valleys sinking from your feet to north and south. The southern valley is that of the *Litany* (Leontes), while the northern is the valley of the *El Asi* (Orontes). Standing on that high vantage-ground you see the valley of the Orontes stretching dim and featureless, steeped in a dye of red that is softened with bluish mist. Turning round, the young Leontes is scarcely visible, as its hair-line cuts the wide expanse along its length, with the white giants of Sannin and Hermon standing guard on either side.

The Leontes valley is familiar to the multitude of travellers who annually visit Baalbek. The less known and less picturesque valley of the upper Orontes is, however, even greater. Wide and roomy, it collects from many points the streams which will yet become a noble river, some of them leaping full born from the mountain side. Its average breadth is from three to four miles, between the tawny mountain sides; and its land is rich, though but poorly cultivated, much of it lying waste and forsaken, with lush grass along the watercourses that cut their bright line through its wilderness.

This valley, if it could but find voice, might tell a strange tale of the ancient world. Along its whole length, in days before the Roman Empire was born, one of the main trade-roads ran, connecting the Phoenician with the Aramean traffic. From Tyre it turned inland, following up the course of the Leontes to its source, and then from the springs of the Orontes descending the valley to Hamath. Down that road went the enormous timber trade from Lebanon, which formed so large a part of Phoenician commerce. The rivers were utilised as well as the road that ran beside them. Timber was floated down the Orontes to Hamath, and thence overland eastward to supply the craftsmen of Assyria and Babylon. It went down the Leontes to Tyre for export and for shipbuilding.

The Roman conquest lent new interest to the ancient river and its valley. The city of Antioch,



BRIDGE OVER THE LITÂNY, JISR EL KARDELI





capital of the Roman province of Syria, was situated near the mouth of the river, and Mommsen states that in the distance of about a hundred miles above the bend of the river near Antioch "there still stand the ruins of nearly a hundred townships, with whole streets still recognisable."[1] Above Homs, in the Coelesyrian part of its valley, there are few traces of Roman building. Here a ruin retains its name of The Roman Tower; there a few feet of causeway remain near a ford; while many built stones of large size tell of an ancient habitation, but give little clue as to the inhabitants. Opposite to Baalbek a solitary Corinthian pillar stands conspicuous in the midst of the plain. It is split, as if by lightning, with a fissure which has even rent its base. Its inscription is entirely eaten away, and tradition connects it with the journey of St. Helena in search of the true cross. Most likely it was raised to commemorate some battle now long forgotten. The most famous Roman memorial of the Orontes, however, is the often-quoted line of Juvenal, telling how in Nero's time "Orontes had flowed into Tiber," and flooded Rome with its troops of Eastern ways and people. In another sense Orontes flowed into Tiber when in later days more than one imperial figure came from its banks to the throne, including Julia Domna, wife of Septimius Severus, a woman famous alike for her learning and for her debauchery.[2] Elagabalus, who came in 218 A.D.

[1] *Provinces*, ii. 141.

[2] She was a native of Homs, where her father was a priest in the temple,

at Emesa to the purple, is, if possible, a more striking example of those vices at which the satirist had sneered. He was a mere boy, as ingenious as he was degraded in his infamy, and he has the distinction of having bestowed the consulship on his horse, and of many other freaks which displayed his peculiar type of humour in more disgusting forms. Such disreputable stories would seem to indicate that this region, now so naked in its decay, was once a centre of that Oriental licentiousness which sapped the strength of the decadent empire.[1]

As for modern Coelesyria, it is a desolate land of some twelve small villages in the fifty miles through which the young Orontes flows. Some of these are pretty enough, clustering round the dainty minaret of a mosque, or bathed by clear streams of water that keep the grass and trees green about them. Others, like the Christian village of Shedeide, are bare beyond description—mere collections of cubical boxes set up for dwelling-places upon rocks. By far the finest of the villages is Riblah, some twenty miles south of Homs. You approach it from the Lake of Homs over fields in which a strange plant grows, with stemless purple flowers like arum lilies, covered with a thick fur over the inside surface. The low band of sharp-cut yellow buildings of the town promises little.

which afterwards became a Christian church, and on whose site the principal mosque now stands.

[1] Compare Lempriere, *sub nomine* Heliogabalus ; also a very striking passage in Stuart Jones, *Roman Empire*, p. 266.



RIBLAH.



EGYPTIAN CAPITAL, RIBLAH.



Inside the wall, you wind along a long narrow street of small, dusty, wizened-looking shops, and out again at the farther side to sweet gardens planted beside cool and clear streams of water. Yet the queer little town is full of pleasant people, and has left behind it by far the most kindly memory of any town we saw. There was the old shopkeeper, sitting smoking his narghili in the evening, who, when told that we wished to photograph him, exclaimed, "Name of Allah, how astonishing!" There was the laughing crowd of young men who hurried us to a house where we might snapshot the local giant, a man seven feet ten inches high,—but the giant hid himself behind his shutters. There was the following of wholesome brown children that trotted after us to the tents, and scampered off like rabbits upon every attempt of ours to cross the intervening space they cautiously preserved, but never once asked for backshish. Black against the lemon-coloured sunset sky trooped the women with their water-jars, and cried to the village lads as they passed them, "May God give you health!" Men by the way greeted us, smiling, with "You are come to your own people, and may the way be plain to your feet!"

Yet this sweet place, which took so softly the evening light reflected from the snows above it, has seen tragedy enough in its time. At a turning in the city street we saw at the posts of a wooden gate two stones carved like capitals of pillars. One was but a basalt millstone; the other was a genuine capital. Its carving caught the eye at once, for instead of the acanthus of

the Greek, this was the Egyptian lotus leaf. We photographed the stone, although the old man of the gate remonstrated in astonishment: "But it is old—behold it is only an old thing!" An old thing it was, and it had reminded us of an old story: "In his days Pharaoh-Necho, king of Egypt, went up against the king of Assyria to the river Euphrates. . . . And Pharaoh-Necho put Jehoahaz in bands at Riblah in the land of Hamath . . . and took Jehoahaz away; and he came to Egypt and died there."[1] There is a still grimmer story that adds its interest to the sleepy little town. After the capture of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, the Chaldean army chased the last king of Judah and overtook him in the plains of Jericho. "So they took the king, and brought him up to the king of Babylon to Riblah, and they gave judgement upon him. And they slew the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, and put out the eyes of Zedekiah, and bound him in fetters of brass, and carried him to Babylon."[2] And the last scene which his eyes saw, across the bloody foreground of his slaughtered sons, was the beauty of those great mountains, white and wonderful with light.

Whatever the road may have been in the ancient days of the trade-route, it is now worthy of the name only in parts. Long stretches of it are little better than bridle-paths, and what few buildings remain between the villages are more or less in ruins. The most common and characteristic of such buildings is the

[1] 2 Kings xxiii. 31-34. [2] 2 Kings xxv. 6, 7.

frequently recurring combination of khan and mill, which in truth is but a pair of long parallel walls, supporting an almost level aqueduct for a few hundred feet out from the hillside, and ending in a turbine wheel driving a mill. Flocks and their shepherds shelter for the night on the lee side of the wall, lying on the open slope of the hillside. On the road there are but few travellers, and almost every one of them is armed with a gun of some sort. Except at very close range the weapons are not dangerous, for these people are afraid of full charges, and load their fowling-pieces with a very little gunpowder to an intolerable quantity of shot. One little party, and one only, we met unarmed. It consisted of a Syrian with a fantastically embroidered jacket, a tall negro and still taller negress, a donkey loaded, and a red-eyed boy carrying on his back the box of a peep-show with four peep-holes furnished with magnifying glasses. We asked them to stop and let us see their show, and when the donkey had been unloaded and the stand set up, the first pictures that met our curious eyes were highly coloured prints of His Majesty King Edward VII. and Queen Alexandra, of the sort that suggested some illustrated advertisement. From village to village these poor folk travel, receiving in payment eggs, milk, cheese, or bread, instead of coin. *Sic transit gloria mundi*, and where are now the kings of Egypt and Babylon, and the generals of Roman troops ?

It seems absurd enough to add to all this the fact that the first branch section of the Bagdad railway runs

down that valley, from Reyak to Homs. There is but one train in the day for passengers, and a most curious and irrelevant spectacle it is. As an oddity it comes near to perfection, and as a means of conveyance it is wonderfully comfortable, and not by any means to be despised even as regards punctuality. There is a fine romance about the thought of this track, now feeling its way farther and farther into the East ; and when one sees the actual line, with its permanent way running a highway across the desert, one feels the immense possibilities of a better future which it brings. As yet, it is amusing rather than impressive. The scene at a railway station, when the town crowds the platform to see the train come in, is the most casual that could be imagined. There is the station-master in all his glory, and there are his wife and daughter, bending from the upper window to exchange greetings with their friends. The passengers are the heroes of the occasion, and they show their sense of superiority with much impressiveness. Next to them come those who are privileged to claim some acquaintance with any of the travelled ones, and these make the station noisy with their shouting, until the whistle's screech is heard above the clatter of human speech, and the platform, still clamorous, is left behind. Some of the railway officials are clever and intelligent men, speaking many languages and cherishing a hospitable and friendly interest in their fellow-creatures. Yet the inevitably recurring question *will* intrude. No one can doubt the ultimate and enormous gain to commerce and industry, and to the outward



PEEPSHOW ON THE ORONTES.



prosperity of lands. In many places there is little either of character or of kindliness to be lost in the gaining of these. But when one sees those sweet and simple people of Riblah—well-mannered and delightful children, that have found the secret of never growing up at all—one may at least be pardoned for the thought that if all the villages were like that, the railway would be a calamity.

Turn back to the watershed, and look southwards to that wide valley sentinelled by the white giants Hermon and Sannin. The tawny and russet plain is six miles broad here, and far down to the left you shall see a great splash of green where Antilibanus touches the eastern edge of the plain. That is Baalbek, and before you have ridden far towards it, there will rise from out the green as if by magic an alabaster-like stand of six columns. The path is rough, and as you draw near to the town it grows rougher still, as though it were leading over the moraines and hollows of ancient quarry holes, which time and the drifting sand had roughly filled in, covering the débris with their uneven shroud. Once that billowy stretch of land is crossed, however, you are at the green oasis that has long refreshed your sight, and in another moment you have plunged into a bosky covert where trees meet overhead and clear waters flow swiftly at your feet. Out and in through that wealth of green the path winds, showing here an ancient and decaying brown wall, there a momentary vision of orange-coloured pillars, until it reaches the town hidden behind all this luxuriance of

foliage, with red roofs shining here and there among houses of the older Eastern pattern.[1]

The town stands high—3850 feet above sea-level—and piercing winds blow upon it until late spring. It is a healthy and bracing place of pure air and abundance of waters. A garrison of gendarmes and the staff of a regiment of reserves are stationed there ; and the guide-books tell of three hotels, four mosques, three churches, and six schools. The native population, which in 1880 was estimated at 5000, is typically Levantine. The Sunday morning parade, in holiday finery, whose extreme fashions of colour and of make contrast strangely with a primitiveness of manners equally extreme, is a bright spectacle, when the men walk with their wives and families under the tall willows of the avenue that leads to the spring of Ras-el-Ain. That is a pleasant sight, and the green sward can tolerate even the gaudiest of colours that bespangle it. But when one turns to the ruins, and finds the mean houses of the townsfolk encroaching on them as they do, that is a different matter. Even at Palmyra, as we shall see, the "swallows'-nest" houses have at least hidden themselves within or under the shadow of the great walls of the temple, and might almost be but the accumulation of débris in the ancient temple court.

[1] Baalbek is fortunate in possessing a native historian, Michel Alouf, who has devoted his life to the study of the ruins and their history. His book, published in several languages, is a very remarkable and valuable guide ; and those who have been fortunate enough to visit the ruins under his personal conduct will not forget the thoroughness and breadth of his information, nor his courtesy in imparting it.

Here a fashionable Levantine watering-place thrusts its cheap vulgarities upon the very ruins on which it depends for all that makes it great and famous, and for part even of its wealth. The exquisite temple of Venus cannot be seen from any point of view which does not include these miserable houses that all but touch its walls, and under the tremendous shadow of the temples of the Acropolis unheeding natives "rear their young with a grand human indifference."

The great field of ruins at Baalbek stands on a platform built up at the lowest slope of the hillside where it touches the plain. Thick foliage of trees screens it from the west, north, and east, and hides in part the intrusion of modern buildings. There remains of the ancient splendours a huge central court, 120 metres square, with a hexagonal vestibule on the east, in which the priests are supposed to have had their dwellings, fronted by a magnificent propylaeum from which a flight of steps descends, 140 feet in breadth. At its western end, the court leads by another flight of steps up to the great Temple of Jupiter, of which only six magnificent columns remain standing, and this temple is surrounded by a terrace resting on gigantic stones, three of which are probably the largest built stones in the world. A second temple, dedicated to Bacchus, stands opposite the junction of the court and temple at a few yards' distance to the east, and a third, the most beautiful of all, is hidden away in a grove of trees, about 600 feet to the south-east of the door of the vestibule. From the year 1900 to 1904

a band of German experts were engaged in clearing out the débris that covered the whole field, and their work has been done in a style beyond all praise. Yet even as they have left it, the place is bewilderingly composite, and the strewn wreckage which everywhere lies in confusion tells the tale of many centuries of earthquake, war, and the vandalism of ignorant and ill-conditioned men.

Guided by the scattered fragments of stone, whether fitted together as they left the builders' hands, or lying promiscuously, blending the labour of centuries in one dishevelled confusion, history feels her way back to the days when these great temples rose. The history of Baalbek, beginning in an unparalleled magnificence of wealth and voluptuous indulgence, has trailed on its long sordid story of fighting and stupidity from the seventh century to the nineteenth, like some wonderful snake once lovely in its paradise, but now trodden and yet helplessly immortal. Turk against Syrian, Egyptian against Asiatic, Saracen againt Crusader, Arab against Roman, Pagan against Christian—so the line of history runs back, interrupted at long intervals by an earthquake or a flood, whose destructions were clean in comparison with those they gave truce to for a moment.

By the vandalism of two successive religions the temples have been treated as quarries for meaner building. Great walls have risen and been thrown down and risen again, built wholly out of fragments of sculptured stones in blocks split to a size more

suitable to the scale of the builders' minds. Unfortunately that was no new spectacle in the world. "The mind fails," says Martin Conway in a remarkable catalogue of destructions,[1] "the mind fails in attempting to grasp some measure of the loss that the world has suffered, not so much from neglect, which is partly excusable, but from wilful and insane destruction." It has been plausibly conjectured that St. Paul's strange list of building materials—"gold, silver, costly (sculptured) stones, wood, hay, stubble"[2]—was written with Corinth in his mind's eye. Mummius the Roman had destroyed the city a hundred years before Paul's time, and the new patchwork city that had been pieced together out of the fragments of the old would show in its house walls many a piece of painted or gilded marble that had once been a statue, many a delicately carved section of capital or frieze. So the art of one generation of our curious race serves the next for rubble, and tempts the cynic to speak cynicism.

It is during the long period from the close of the twelfth century onwards that this destruction was at its worst. Great fortress walls,[3] loopholed for arrows, replace the magnificence of the ancient façade and cast their shadows over the site of the temple which they have devoured. Arab baths display, beside the wall of the Christian church that hid the ancient pagan altar,

[1] *Dawn of Art*, p. 14. [2] 1 Corinthians iii. 12.

[3] Most of the relics of these date back to the time of Saladin and his successors.

thin red water-pipes of earthenware. Piles of stone balls, of diameter varying from four inches to twelve inches, are heaped in the great court. These are the catapult stones of which we read in various early sieges. They help us to realise the meaning of the astonishing statement that in the twelfth century "Zinki came and besieged this town, which, for three months, resisted the storm of projectiles, hurled by fourteen catapults, which were worked day and night."[1] After destroying the temple the Arabs started upon the destruction of its substructure, but, fortunately, that was too massive for their patience, and they left it practically unharmed. They fortified the place strongly, but in doing so destroyed most of what made it worth preserving. They spent what leisure time they had in carefully chipping the faces off the figures of men and women, and even of oxen, that had been carved by ancient artists. Of all that long story of retreats and advances, of long siege and wholesale slaughter, of furious combat and frequent treachery, what remains beyond the dreadful patchwork walls? Two things, perhaps, that are more typical of the men than any others. One is the little *wely* or shrine of Douris, built in the thirteenth century to some Moslem saint now long forgotten. Everything about it is wrong. Uneven and ill-matched fragments of columns from the temple support an architrave which knows nothing of the laws of architecture; and an ancient sarcophagus lies upon the ground, which once did duty for the *mihrab* or

[1] Alouf, *Baalbek*, p. 59.



THE BIKA WITH THE SHRINE OF DOURIS





praying-niche. The other memorial is the legend of the magic well. The well is within the enclosure and is forty-five metres deep. Its supply was generally scanty, but when the door of the citadel was shut its waters increased, and whenever the fortress was attacked the well rose to the occasion for the help of the defenders.

Before those Arab wars, the great court was the scene of a spiritual battle between the paganism which had here so gorgeously expressed itself and the young Christian Church. Not that court only, but the temples of Bacchus and Venus also were used for Christian worship, the latter being dedicated to St. Barbara. The symbol of the cross is inscribed on several pillars in these various temples, while such symbols as the A and Ω are also to be found. Yet it was in the court that the Christian Church had its main centre of assembly and of worship, and has left its chief memorial. To these early Christians the pagan gods were as literal realities as they had been to the ancestors of those who still worshipped them. They were devils, who had seduced men to their hideous cult; and it must have been with a glow of triumph over hell that the Christian builders cut its carved work from the fallen pediment, and built out of it the walls of their basilica. The eastern wall of their apse they built along one of the steps of the stairway that had led up towards the great altar of Jupiter. Particularly curious and interesting is the fact that instead of removing the great altar of sacrifice, they built a platform eight feet high so as to raise

their floor above the level of its top.[1] A huge block that altar is, with its runnel cut in the old pavement of the court for the flow of blood from the sacrifices, and it must have been a strange thought to them, as they sat there at their simple sacrament, that on that very spot they were covering with the white linen of Christ the ancient table of devils. It is usual to attribute this basilica to Theodosius the Great, and so to fix its date in the later years of the fourth century.[2] On its first erection the entrance was from the west, in accordance with the usage of the Greek Church, the single apse being, of course, at the eastern extremity. In the latter part of the sixth century a change in the liturgy led to the change in the churches of the Eastern communion from one apse to three, and this was done in the basilica of Baalbek.[3] The curious fact is that the three apses are placed, contrary to custom, at the western instead of at the eastern end. This, together with the fact that the central of the three western apses is pierced with a passage for entrance, has led to the conjecture that the three apses were the first form, and that the basilica was originally built at the end of the sixth century, when that was the fashion of ecclesiastical architecture. Then, owing to a second change of liturgy, the single apse was substituted for the three, and the ends reversed. This latter hypothesis would permit of the interesting explanation that in the

[1] Compare an article in *The Builder*, July 1, 1905, by R. Phené Spiers, F.S.A.

[2] Report of German excavators, etc.

[3] Spiers, *The Builder*, July 1, 1905.

days when the three apses were built, the Christian Church was still so much in dread of the seductions of heathen worship, that they reversed the customary orientation, and built up the end looking towards the great temple ; while by the time when the second change had come, they had ceased to fear Jupiter, and boldly opened a passage from their church towards his shrine, being in this way enabled to follow the usual orientation. The interest of the point is slight, except that here we have a curious illustration of the history of the development of thought written in stone. However that may be, the basilica, standing in humble triumph over the altar of the ancient demon, its arched walls built of fragments of his fallen temple and sheltered from wind and weather by the lofty walls of its court, presents a suggestive picture of that early Church that was thus already occupying the place of the Roman Empire. A strange and bloody story was that of this Church in the stronghold of the older gods. From Nero to Constantine, from Constantine to Julian, from Julian back to Theodosius, the life of the Christian Church swung onwards, persecution alternating with imperial favours. Christians whose fathers had conducted the solemn liturgies in the basilica wore out their wretched lives in the quarries, and their children again triumphed in the court. Besides the mighty Jupiter-Baal frowning eastwards on them from his temple, a multitude of minor deities looked down on that Christian meeting-place from the walls of the court in whose centre it was erected. If the art of

the basilica, with its broken masonry of priceless chisel-work, be questionable, at least its romance is as great as could well be imagined.

From very ancient times Baalbek must have been a place of importance. Its situation and its abundant water-supply fitted it to be, as it has been called from a military point of view, "the bridle of Anti-Lebanon." But a far greater and farther-reaching importance attaches to it as the chief seat in these regions of the Syrian worship of Baal. Many successive temples of the sun-god must have risen there in the days before Rome had begun to look eastward. When at last the Romans took up the work of building, they began in their usual thorough fashion by clearing out every vestige of the older structures, so that absolutely nothing remains of the Phoenician temples anywhere. As there is no written history of the building of the Roman temples, we are left to the witness of inscriptions and of coins, and it must be confessed that as yet this testimony is confusing. The style of the architecture is Corinthian, elaborately and voluptuously ornamental; but that fact affords little clue to the precise date, being characteristic of the whole Graeco-Roman period. On the one hand, relying on a seventh-century record, the building of a temple at Heliopolis (Baalbek), which was one of the wonders of the world, has been usually attributed to Antoninus Pius (138-161 A.D.).[1] In

[1] It is interesting to remember that among the other works of this emperor was the rebuilding in 140 A.D. of the rampart between the Firths of Forth and Clyde.

corroboration of this the fact is cited that up to that period the coins of Baalbek show but the device of colonist and ox, while coins struck shortly afterwards, in the reign of Septimius Severus, show the great temple for the first time.[1] On the other hand, inscriptions have been found by the recent excavators belonging to the times of Agrippa, Vespasian, and Nero.[2] On this ground it has been asserted that building went on from the early days of the Christian era, through the first three centuries A.D., and that Antoninus Pius can only have repaired the great temple, or perhaps may have built the second smaller one to Bacchus.[3] The reply would be that whatever explanation may be given of these inscriptions, the first coin which shows two temples is of the time of Valerian, a hundred years after Antoninus Pius ; and that on the pedestals of the propylaea two columns and their capitals were erected and carved to the memory of Antoninus Pius, "a dedication which could only have been made on the assumption that the main portion of the acropolis was the work of that emperor."[4] This inscription, however, as given more accurately by M. Joyau, records only that Aurelius Antoninus, an officer in the army, had gilded at his own expense the capitals of two columns for the safety and success of Antoninus Pius and his mother,[5] and this seems to destroy a main part of the evidence in favour

[1] Spiers, *The Builder*, Feb. 11, 1905.
[2] Puchstein, *Ausgrabungen in Baalbek*, p. 23.
[3] Alouf, *Baalbek*, 41, etc.
[4] Spiers, *The Builder*, Feb. 11, 1905.
[5] Alouf, *Baalbek*, pp. 43, 98, 133.

of Antoninus Pius. But however that may be, there can be no question that both building and decoration must have gone on through many reigns. They were apparently discontinued in the time of Marcus Aurelius, resumed by Caracalla (who is said to have built the propylaea and hexagonal vestibule), discontinued again by Constantine, resumed by Julian, and finally abandoned by Theodosius the Great, who has been credited with the pulling down of the greater part of the Temple of Jupiter and the building of the Christian basilica. From the facts that some panels on the wall of the great laver in the court are finely carved, while others are left in the rough for future carving, and that the sculptured frieze of the Temple of Bacchus is unfinished, we can perceive that the work was going on to the end of the pagan *régime*.

What strikes one first and last about these extraordinary ruins as most characteristic, is neither their size nor their beauty of sculpture, though in both these respects they are wonderful, but their dramatic effectiveness from the point of view of landscape. The architects of Baalbek, whoever they may have been, had certainly an unsurpassed eye for effect. The great pyramid stands on the highest hill near Cairo, and commands the desert and the city. Baalbek, as you approach it or as you recede from it across the plain, rises steadily upon its platform till it stands, at the proper distance, conspicuous and alone, dominating all the valley and utilising Antilibanus for its background. The platform, built strong and high



GENERAL VIEW OF THE ACROPOLIS, BAALBEK





upon thick-walled arches, serves its purpose so effectively that its temples seem to sit in the centre of the land as on a throne, claiming the mountains behind and the valley in front as if they had both been put there for its sake. Again, when you ascend the hill behind the village and look down upon the temples from the east, the sight is one of magnificent unreality. Across a belt of green sward fringed with trees, the long bare wall of the Bacchus temple takes the light, flanked at either end by rows of gigantic pillars bearing a rich entablature. They are striped by light and shadow in long vertical lines of bright orange and dark blue, and these are set up against the indigo and white of Lebanon sky-lines, fainter, yet as hard in outline as themselves. There is somehow no other place which so insistently draws itself away from Nature and gives the impression of scenery on the stage. Even the half-fallen pillar, which from the eighteenth century[1] has leant against the temple wall, cannot really be a pillar tied drum to drum so securely by its metal tongues that it has kept its straight line unchanged. It also must be but a painted thing.

Yet undoubtedly it will always be in connection with the incredible size of its single blocks of stone that Baalbek will be most famous. The general effect of massiveness, and the entire scale of the buildings, could easily have been achieved by building with smaller stones which would not have involved the

[1] It appears in the splendid wood-engravings of Wood and Dawkins, published in 1757.

superhuman difficulties actually conquered by these builders. One grows weary of figures recounting the size and weight of the innumerable gigantic stones of the temple. As you walk about the place you are dwarfed now by a colossal fragment of the pediment that once stood high above the ground, now by a stairway, eight steps of which are hewn out of a single block. The eye ceases to perceive the immensity of scale, and the imagination falters in its attempt to realise what this actually meant for the builders. All conjecture as to what mechanical contrivance was used to put these blocks so exactly in their places fails. Mr. Alouf is so much affected by the contemplation of the ruins that he hears them exclaiming to the traveller: "O you who are enraptured at these gigantic works, admire especially in contemplating us, what man can do when genius lends her aid." Temporary sloping causeways, huge artificial mounds up which the stones were dragged, cranes and pulleys of wood—no doubt some such methods must have been employed, and we can see such in the remains of causeway near the Pyramids of Ghizeh, and on Assyrian bas-reliefs.[1] Human life was cheap, and the stones of all such structures are cemented with the blood of innumerable slaves. And yet, after all that is said, how was the thing done? The trilithon, consisting of three stones averaging about 62 ft. by 14 by 11, are

[1] Such embankments, for the transport of colossal bulls from the quarries to the palace gateways of Konyunjik, are represented in elaborate detail in Layard's bas-reliefs.

raised to a height of 25 feet, set exactly square in their places, and "the joints are so accurate that it is impossible to insert the blade of a knife between them."[1] Yet each of these blocks has sufficient stone in it to build a house 60 feet in frontage and in depth, and 40 feet in height, with walls one foot in thickness. They rest upon a plinth of smaller but still enormous blocks, and form part of an enclosing wall built round three sides of the Temple of Jupiter. They were undoubtedly built after that temple, for a still larger fourth block is to be seen in the quarry, evidently intended for a place next to those which were already erected. It is commonly stated that the object of this tremendous podium was to keep the temple in its place, securing its foundations from side-thrust by the roof. But the temple was not built, as that theory would imply, on an earthen mound, nor was the weight of its roof sufficient to affect the enormous mass of its pillars. On the contrary, the fragments of roof which are abundantly strewn on the floor of the Bacchus temple are of ordinary Roman tiles, and not of stone. As to the foundations, the Roman builders here as elsewhere carried these all the way down to the bed-rock, as the recent excavations have proved.[2] The only theory remaining appears to be that of Mr. Phené Spiers, that this outer ring of Cyclopean foundation-work was intended to support a mightier peristyle or temple-wall, which would have been a veritable Tower of

[1] *The Builder*, Feb. 11, 1905.
[2] Spiers, *The Builder*, Feb. 11, 1905.

Babel, almost impossible to picture in imagination. Before the podium of this huge temple was completed Antoninus Pius died, and when Septimius Severus resumed the work he did not continue it on the original gigantic scale, but left the next monster stone in the quarry where the former emperor's workmen had hewn it, and proceeded to build the temple, whose six columns now remain standing, on the smaller foundation within the vast ring of Antoninus' podium.[1]

Why did they do this unheard-of thing? In a former book[2] the writer quoted an opinion that having seen the huge Jewish stones at Jerusalem, the Romans — "Barnums of the ancient world" — were determined to outdo the East in its own line, the delight in colossal size for its own sake. There is no question that the Syrian East did delight in mere size, as every reader of the Old Testament or of Josephus knows. Nor need we hesitate to concede that the Romans, in this as in the matter of religious belief and ritual, had caught the spirit of the lands they conquered. There may have been other reasons. Perhaps they wished to build for eternity, and imagined that these structures would, by their sheer weight, defy earthquakes to the end of time. Certainly they built for effect, and wished their building to be in proportion to the plain beneath it and to the mountain behind. Yet, when they had seen the

[1] Spiers, *The Builder*, Feb. 11, 1905.

[2] *The Holy Land*, p. 129.



THE TEMPLE OF JUPITER, BAALBEK





Eastern delight in the colossal they must have felt it congenial to their own instinct. Palmyra strikes the traveller as a dainty lady, Baalbek as a strong man; and Rome was strong before all else and beyond it. Strength was the authentic note of her spirit and the secret of her whole history. It is no wonder that in former times the building of these masses of stone was accounted impossible for human skill, and the temples of Baalbek were attributed to Solomon's genii. The native tradition is that the great stones and carvings of Baalbek were not quarried at all, but cast in moulds and conveyed to their places by slave-spirits. But the genius that really built Baalbek was the *genius Romanus*, when the East had suggested a tempting line for its exercise, and the treasury of the empire was abundant.

However it may have originated, a taste for extravagance in size, indulged with such boundless lavishness, might well have destroyed all fineness of taste and delicacy of workmanship. It is by no means always true that

> He who blows thro' bronze may breathe thro' silver,

nor that the fresco painter may seize a hair-brush and adorn a missal-margin with flowers. Even in Egypt, where the sense of beauty was never lost, the overpowering conception of mere mass and weight, that bulged the pillars and slanted the walls of temples into the semblance of truncated pyramids, gave a squat look to much great building, as of a thing oppressed

and crushed to earth. At Baalbek, on the contrary, although for size of monolith at least the buildings are without a parallel in the world, there is no such lack either of spirit or of delicacy. The columns are indeed gigantic, but their proportion is as perfect as their mass is astounding. They taper sufficiently to give that effect of spring and buoyancy with which the rational free spirit of Greece superseded the heaviness of Egyptian tyrant-built structures ; yet the tapering is too slight to be visible as such to the eye, and it never gives away its secret. Judging from what remains, and taking into consideration the lofty platform on which they were set forth, it is safe to say that these mighty temples, in the days of their early glory, did not obtrude their size upon the beholder ; but always, whether seen from near or far, gave for the first impression that of perfect symmetry and consequent beauty. The little Temple of Venus, though its masonry is not so exact, nor the joints of its stones so perfect, as those of the vaster buildings, yet is probably one of the most beautiful pieces of building, for design and proportion, that is to be seen anywhere in the world. It surprises you to read that the door of the Temple of Bacchus is 43 feet in height. That door is so beautiful, and it harmonises so well with all the rest, that it had not occurred to you before that it was also of a prodigious dimension.

The detail of the carving is incredibly elaborate and profuse. Its luxuriant opulence is certainly character-

istic of a voluptuous and decadent age. In the exhedra chapels of the great court, instead of the customary entablature, there springs clean from the abacus of each pilaster a second smaller pilaster that seems to lose itself upwards in a veritable wilderness of cornice, in which all imaginable efflorescence of decoration pours itself out line upon line. The most elaborate and minute chisel-work is evidently the latest, for, both at the Temple of Bacchus and on the sides of the laver in the great court, it ends, as we have seen, in half-finished designs and rough-hewn panels not yet overtaken. The larger carvings are wonderful for their perfection of detail—a perfection which has behind it not the mere conscientiousness of the painstaking artizan, but the evident delight of the artist in his work. The lions' heads of the frieze of the great temple, whose expression is something between the rage of the Assyrian and the repose of the Egyptian lion, show the curve of the ear and the hair of mane and whiskers, exquisitely true to nature, although these stood about 80 feet above the ground. The same thing is true of the elaborately carved roof of the peristyle of the Bacchus temple, with its relief scroll-work and hexagons enclosing figures of gods and goddesses. The large ox heads of the laver, which were always below the level of the eye, are actually poorer and less expressive than those magnificent creations that stood so far above. But the most remarkable feature of the whole is the delicacy of the minutest work. This is evidently the latest, and it is

to be seen around the outside of the door of the Bacchus temple, and on many panels of the laver in the great court. The chisels that cut these dainty lines must have been of needle-like fineness, and the hands that wielded them delicate indeed. On the laver there are fairy-carvings, in which each human figure is but six or eight inches long, representing Cupids astride of dragons, hunting dolphins with bows and arrows, and other equally playful scenes pictured in the lightest and daintiest fashion imaginable. Even finer and more minute are the carvings about the door-posts of the Temple of Bacchus, which remind one of the little marginal *remarques* with which etchers sometimes adorn the edges of their pictures. Here are to be seen lizards, birds, Cupids, and countless other designs, only an inch or so in size, with an exquisite running decoration of vine-stems and leaves, the very veins on the leaves being shown with microscopic accuracy. And the finest of all these miniatures is one whose significance is infinitely suggestive. It is a carving of wheat and poppies. Wheat, indeed, is a common emblem in these sculptures. One of the figures of the peristyle roof represents Eirene (Peace) suckling Ploutos (Wealth), and has at its side an ear of corn, the emblem of harvest and peace.[1] The Mohammedans have a legend that the forbidden fruit of Eden was not an apple, but wheat. In the Temple of Bacchus one may legitimately remember that legend, and let the wheat stand not merely for labour but for

[1] Alouf, *Baalbek*, p. 107.



TEMPLE OF VENUS, BAALBEK





life in all its sensuous fulness.[1] But the poppies always stand for sleep and death. "I saw," says a recent writer, "a field of corn, straight, and still, and green when the wind was quiet. But a sudden gust bowed the corn, and I saw the red poppies burning beneath." To dwell on the delicate symbol would be but to tarnish it. Yet it is very memorable. The stone of the trilithon weighs 720 tons. The lions crown an entablature 13 feet in height that rose like a crown on the mighty Temple of Jupiter. But here, in the space of a few inches, some artist confessed the truth of it all—poppies and wheat.

It is worth while to spend some days at Baalbek, and to return again and again to the temples. Those who do this will soon find the mere wonder of stupendous size yield to other thoughts. Even the dramatic effectiveness and the exquisite beauty of the detail cease to captivate the imagination. Deeper questions displace one's first amazement at the architecture, and the whole vast erection settles down to its ultimate interest—man's attempt to find some solution of the grand mystery of his being, the true inwardness of the sculpture of poppies and wheat. The Temples of Bacchus and Venus are intelligible enough. They are man's frank acceptance of the flesh, and his insistence that

[1] "The corn spirit, which the Romans worshipped as the goddess Ceres, was a cult which still exists unconsciously at our very doors. The little plaited ears of corn hung up in a farmhouse kitchen, which the writer has seen within the past few days (December 1893), speak of the slaying of a divinity, such as the Egyptian Osiris, and of the subsequent resurrection of the life-giving corn."—ELWORTHY, *The Evil Eye*, p. 107.

the poignancy of its experience may lead him out somehow into a region beyond the earth. Yet Venus hidden in her grove, and Bacchus laughing near the greater temple, are but accessories to that central mystery which the great court and the house of Jupiter-Baal represent. The great court, 385 by 400 feet in size, is surrounded by a lofty wall with twelve chambers (ἐχεδραι) in its sides. The number *twelve* corresponds to the number of the chief divinities of Olympus. But each of these chambers is fitted with little tabernacles, to the number of two hundred and thirty, and there are a hundred more in the hexagonal vestibule, where the priests had their dwellings. In these tabernacles there were statues of three hundred and thirty gods—presumably the lesser gods of Rome and the local deities of Syria. This fact is of a piece with the entire design of the great court and hexagonal vestibule. Everywhere the blend of nationalities is the main feature of the place. The eagle which you see in the vestibule is doubtless Jove's eagle, yet it is of an Oriental and not a Roman pattern. All sorts of men and things are sculptured there, from the negro to the Cupid. The columns of the portico were of Syenite granite from Assouan in Egypt, brought by sea on rafts to Seleucia, and up the Orontes as far as possible, and thence dragged by oxen on sledges along the Roman road to Baalbek. Even the Bacchus temple has a reminiscence of Egypt in the shape of its doorway, and the capitals of its doorpost pillars are of lotus and not acanthus leaves. Opulence and cosmopolitanism

are everywhere, in that wide tolerance of the later paganism which refused nothing that came calling itself divine. It was the age of syncretism, and what that meant in the history of religious faith we shall endeavour to estimate in a later chapter. But meanwhile it may be noted that the Roman soldier came to Baalbek before the Roman builder, and the Roman soldier was the greatest agent in the unification of ancient worships. He found strange gods, but the gods he knew were the ancient ones that had come to Rome from Greece. Identifying the new with the old, he was the unconscious agent in leading the world to recognise that the two systems of faith were one at the depths. Two results followed. The Pantheon of the great court was the simpler of the two. Mass the gods, neglect nothing that any man has worshipped. The old faith is tottering, and one cannot be sure of any detail. But mass the gods, and worship them all. It may be—nay, surely it must be—that out of three hundred and thirty arrows shot into the unseen one at least will find its mark. But the second result is seen in that tremendous temple on which the court entered, with its gigantic statue — now long since vanished — of Jupiter-Baal. Here was the ultimate divinity, the One to whom the many gods led up. All of them were but symbols of man's attempt to conceive the highest, and of his conception of how the highest should be worshipped. Baal, the god of light and all fruitfulness and fecundity, identified with Jupiter, king of the Western gods—here was a symbol at

least of the ultimate divinity. In the midst of a thousand superstitions, debased with lusts and embellished by wondrous legends, man was seeking after God, and in some instances it may be finding Him.

CHAPTER IV

ANTILIBANUS[1]

While Lebanon, bounded by the sea coast on the west and by the long valley of Coelesyria on the east, runs unbroken along its entire line from Tyre to Tripoli, Antilibanus has a very different outline. On the west, indeed, it falls into Coelesyria along its whole length, fronting Lebanon with a broadside of mountain as clear and strait as its own, though of a lower altitude. In the Bible it is referred to as "Lebanon towards the sun-rising."[2] Again, looking towards the south and west from Homs, the two ranges appear to end abruptly in the vast gateway through which Orontes flows out of the northern end of Coelesyria, and the mountain gate-posts of that great gate are to all appearance straight over against one another. According to names, that eastern range, and that alone, is Antilibanus. Thus considered, the Antilibanus lies in the shape of a letter *i*, whose dot is Mount Hermon,

[1] This chapter is placed here in geographical sequence, although much of the country it describes was traversed after leaving Damascus.

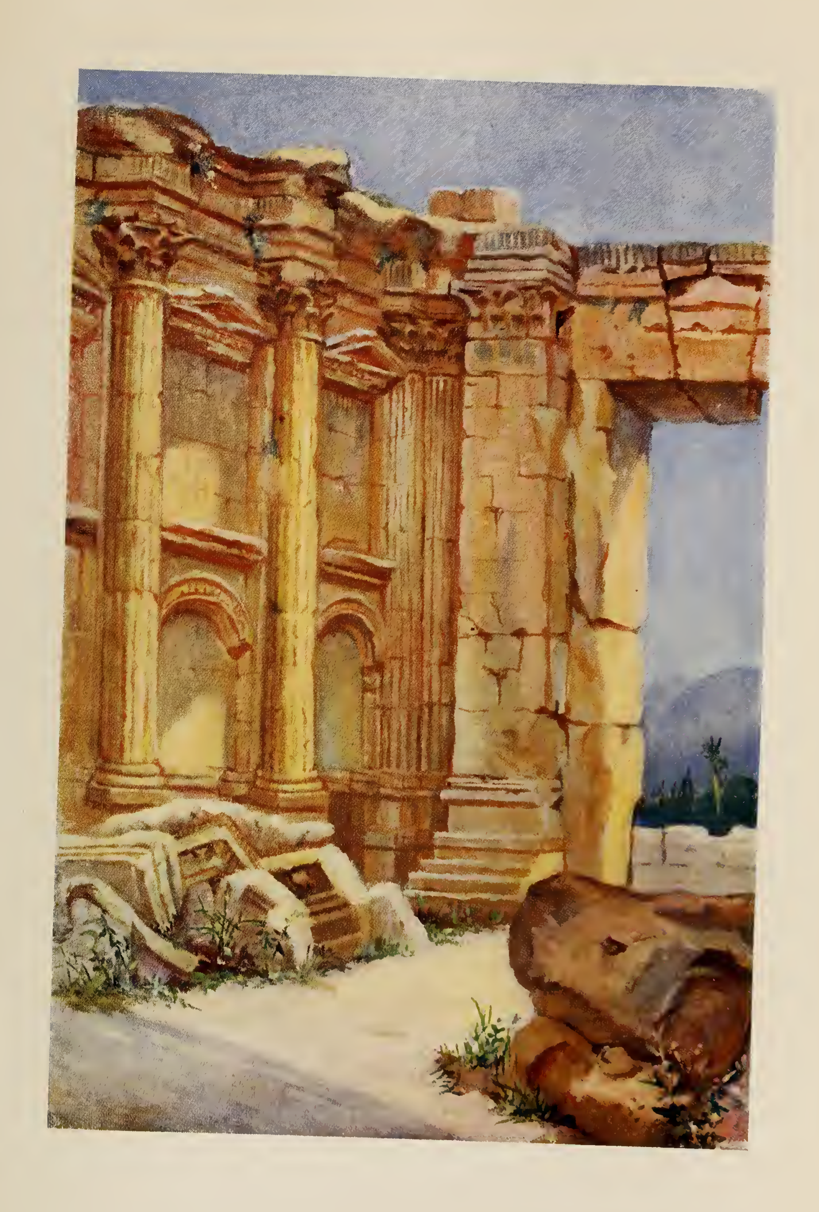
[2] Joshua xiii. 5.

detached from the rest only by the deep-cut valley of the Barada (Abana). Its claim to possess Hermon more than compensates for its lesser height. In respect even of height Hermon is not so far behind. For Sannin of Lebanon reaches only 8555 feet; and while the Jebel Arz is 10,007, Hermon can boast of 9050. But the peculiar place which Hermon occupies in the land gives it a commanding and unique importance. As you journey southward, up the long valley of the upper waters of Orontes, Sannin dominates the view, and fills up the valley-end with its whiteness. But once across the watershed, and descending the other part of Coelesyria alongside the young Litany, Hermon to the left has quite usurped the place of the rival mountain. Standing off from the east, it has so much character and individuality that over against it the towering heights of Sannin seem but higher parts of the range to which they belong. Hermon belongs to nothing, though in truth it is the southern spur of Antilibanus. Rather do the range, and the whole land, belong to Hermon; and with its great head of silver it could have been called by no other name than that which it has—Jebel esh-Shêkh. Farthest seen and most beautiful of the mountains of Syria, it glorifies the range that in some sense claims it.

Hermon lies squarely opposite the southern end of Lebanon, and sends off the lower Antilibanus (Jebel es Sherki) from it to the north. But while that range fronts (as has been already said) the Lebanon as far as the Gates of Homs, yet on the eastern side it has no



THE TEMPLE OF BACCHUS, BAALBEK—INTERIOR





such boundary as the western valley. On the contrary, from that short trunk of mountain range, not more than a hundred miles in length, other ranges longer than itself branch off at various angles, and spread out upon the map like the branchings of a cactus-plant into farther and farther distances to the north-east. These ranges have each its name, but in strict geography they all belong to Antilibanus. At first, in the south-western regions of their network, they are, except on the face they present to the desert, not wholly barren. As on Lebanon, there are many slopes of them richly wooded, though the trees are of no great size, and they are marked with intensely vivid splashes of green, where springs break forth from the rock. The curious lines which their branching has taken enclose vast amphitheatres of oval plain, in which lie trim villages like flat brown islands with a circle of shimmering green about their walls. Out and in of these spurs great and little valleys wind their way, guided by the track of the watercourses which winter torrents have chiselled through their softer rocks. Ochre-coloured and unlovely are these valleys, yet not without some herbage and an occasional permanent stream. But as they stretch farther out, they become ever barer and more bare, till at length they thrust into the desert ranges that match it for barrenness. Some of these are chains of long low sand-dunes, shore-lines that have never heard the sound of a breaking wave. Others, and especially the two great lines that begin from distances fifty or sixty miles apart at Karyatein

and Furklus and converge in an immense arrow-head angle till their meeting forms the Gate of Palmyra, are nobler heights. These great ranges are sculptured out of the living rock, bare and waterless but for certain few springs well hidden and often searched for in vain. They are but, as it were, tilted desert, and more pitilessly arid than the plain. Yet in the changing lights of the East these ranges have a singular and rich beauty and suggestiveness. In one place the sky-line of Antilibanus proper lies towards Jabrud like an old broadsword of unrusted steel, that sets its hacked and jagged cutting edge against the sky. In another, and that impression remains obvious for days of riding, the eastern wall of mountains points towards Palmyra like a flung lance along the horizon. But for those ranges which enclose them the steppe-plains of the Kalamun region are little broken by hills, although here and there solitary cones, sometimes peaked but oftener truncated to the resemblance of a *tarbush*, are thrown up, as it were, from the flat, and there is one gigantic crescent in which a short spur ends not far from Hameira, that might be a battery for the guns of Titans.

The colours of these mountains are strange as are their lines. They are for the most part faint and indeterminate, a sort of tartan woven of many threads of red and green and white, along which here and there a brown or grey village lies like an abba dropped by a shepherd on the ground ; or a faint russet that suggests the reverse side of some Persian carpet flung

upon the heights, but fading in the distance into misty lavender or lilac. About the region of Jabrud, however, the paleness takes another aspect. There is a green meadow there, where the walls of hillside narrow to a little pass, and the rocks of it have on them a sheen of reds and blues like the plumage of a dove's neck. But once through the pass, you find confronting you a conical hill of some hundreds of feet in height, coloured in palest green, and dainty as a mountain of Japan, the foreground out of which it rises being of pale pink and yellow.

Yet that is rare, and in evening lights the motley hillsides that were faint by day take on the most passionate hues. In noontide sunshine these rocks are so faint that they seemed not real rock at all, but some thin imitation such as might be found among the properties of a theatre. By daylight all is hard and dead, and the neutral tints of thorn, heath, and desert herb and flower seem to proclaim the utter indifference of a land to all things human that are, or have been, or are to be. Yet at evening the traveller is surprised by the sudden bars of livid and tawny rock that seem to be veritable iron and brass. Dark purple or rusty patches, or madder or claret-coloured, seem like spilt wine upon the rocks, or old blood that no rains will wash away. And while these parts of the range flame back to the crimson of the sunset, that which is in shadow assumes a chilling coldness. The distant indigo of mountains, with zebra-like stripes of snow ribbing them, or the dead cold blue of the Eastern sky, seem

almost human expressions, assumed by the shadowed rocks in protest against the shameless flush of those that face the sun.

The note of the whole region is its stoniness, and in all that has been described there is the almost artificial appearance of an immense pattern of the work of lapidaries. But that feature reaches its utmost in one peculiarity of most of these ranges. Along their summits runs in most cases a comb-like ridge of short precipice whose upper edge forms the sky-line. Beneath this ridge, the hillside falls to the valley bottom in the quite regular slope of a moraine. Looked at from behind, the range rises along its summit in a billowy ascent of smooth and sometimes glassy stone, like the long back of a wave blown by strong winds and breaking high over a sharp edge. In front, the little precipices are, as it were, the perpendicular section of these billows of stone. In parts the strata are looped and fantastically frilled, iron-grey in colour with edges of white. Others are like sliced agate, with a wonderfully rich twist of amber, brown, and white ; while yet others, unstratified, show long stretches of a green like jade.

Wandering among these mountains, one breathes an air exhilarating as that of the Scottish Highlands, but dry and generally warm also. In spring, even in the lower plains, we never found the heat oppressive, yet even at the height of 5350 feet, where the pass crosses its summit between Ma'alula and Jabrud, it was not cold. And it was unbreathed air, fresh and

clean as the wind that blows across mid-ocean. There was much wind, as there generally is. For in the lower plains to the eastward the air is heated by the sun, and, rising, is replaced towards evening by great currents of air that have been kept cold by the snows of Lebanon and on the lesser heights between. Thus in the desert, wind-storms are of constant occurrence. Sometimes a thunderstorm gathers on the heights, and from the far distance the outlying villages watch its play of lightning against a black sky. For a certain space the wind of it drives westward and the outriders of the rain-clouds whip the backs of horsemen with chilly blows as they ride to the east, while in the van of the storm twisted pillars of whirling sand dance onward for a certain distance. Very different is the wind against which those who ride to Homs from the east must often battle. Rising suddenly in the mountains, it smites the city with its much smoke and dust, until it would seem as if every house in all its breadth had been set on fire, so dense is the cloud that rises. Thus the city is utterly blotted out, and the evil cloud sweeps on, swallowing and effacing one after another the white villages of the plain, until it strikes the horsemen who have watched it, and makes their journey poisonous with its blast of city refuse. That wind has far to travel: by night it will have smitten Palmyra, and those that have their tents there will of necessity fasten them by guy-ropes to the pillars of the Colonnade, for every peg will be drawn speedily from the sand. But by the time it has reached so far,

the wind will have lost its foulness, and if dust be in it, it will be clean dust of the desert.

Near the Jebel es Sherki there is abundance of water, and the larger towns among the mountains even of Kalamun are nourished with full streams. Eastwards, as we shall see later on, the streams have ceased, and for water man and beast must trust to wells. But even far to the west among these ranges wells are precious. Often the way leads past the ruins of a khan, long crumbled into dust. But beside it, among a few broken pillars that once stood to honour the place of waters, the well is still kept clear, and its waters are for all to drink. By far the greatest of the waters of Antilibanus are those of the Barada (Abana), which in the long forgotten past created the city of Damascus—largest of all the oases in the East—and upon which she still depends for her continuance. The Barada is wholly a gift of Antilibanus, one of its springs rising in Hermon and others in the Jebel es Shurif and the foot-hills near it in Coelesyria. The Gorge of Barada has been often described, and it is no wonder. For in that land of dry rock and deep-sunk hidden waters, it is a memorable sight to see its rush and fury. The railway runs to Damascus by the side of it, and even those passengers who have seen it since their childhood grow excited, and one will cry, "See how Barada tumbles down, yellow and white!" In the spring-time, when snows are melting on the heights, it roars down the long valley in great flood. At Ain Fiji it is joined by a fountain that rises tumultuously



MOUNT HERMON FROM DAMASCUS





from the ground, a full-born river of greater volume than the Barada, and from thence the two flow side by side for a considerable distance, the yellow and the black unmingled. The glad orchards, with apple-blossom already in full flower, stand deep in the flowing waters, which sweep past, deep and strong, among the submerged boles of trees.

The desert vegetation, in which this region is rich, will be described in a later chapter. Where the streams are large the vegetation is luxuriant, and such towns as Jabrud are surrounded by rich meadows, over whose green there is a thin sprinkling of lilac flowers. In such places among the mountains the waysides are iridescent with a wonderful growth of wild-flowers, and the air is often richly laden with a scent like southernwood, at once sweet and aromatic. Great masses of squills are found in clumps of bushes like iris. Fruits of many kinds abound, and at every railway station there are children selling baskets of figs and pomegranates. Over all uncultivated ground there lies a veil of dim blae colour, which is given by dwarf thorn bushes, and here and there the naked white thorns of the *Spina Christi* shine among these. The characteristic tree of the region is no longer the cedar, which is extinct in Antilibanus, but the poplar. Long rows of these graceful trees thrive in the neighbourhood of every village, and supply roofs for the homes that stand where of old men built with cedar beams.

Much of the land among the western ranges is

richly cultivated. You ascend long green valleys by the sides of streams, and at last look over the ridge of a new saddle-back only to see, on the plain below you, new and wide expanses of earth brown from the plough, or the rich green of mulberries and growing wheat and grass. On the village threshing-floors women are sifting wheat, and the clean colour and scent of it gives an air of wellbeing to the countryside; and cultivation is, at the present time, spreading higher and higher up these mountains. All this is impressive and heartening even on the approach from the richer lands of Lebanon. But as you return from the desert journey its exhilaration is an intoxication of delight. Very gradually you realise that the shades of green are changing from the stony and unnatural expanses of desert seen through a veil of dim kali-plant or of hermil to the living meadows and the sown fields. It is like a long draught of water to a thirsty soul, and as you go deeper and deeper into even such vegetation as the Kalamun mountains and the plains of Homs afford, you realise something of what it means to have passed from death to life.

Except for flocks of camels and other beasts of burden or of pasture, there is little animal life to be seen in this region. Far out to the east a fox or jackal, or even a hyaena, may still be seen slinking across the plain in the dusk of evening. The conies—that extraordinary little race of feeble folk which nevertheless have the rocks for their refuge — are there. They cannot be classified, and stand by themselves among



TOWER OF ST. PAUL, DAMASCUS





the species; and, indeed, they are seldom to be seen. Bears still are met with among the caves of the heights, and those who bring new land under cultivation still build a tower in their fields to watch and guard against them. For the bear is a cunning thief, and whereas the camel or the sheep will take a clean bite from your chick-pea and pass on, the bear will take the whole branch into his mouth, and draw it through, stripping every pod. Larks were singing everywhere as we crossed those fields, and quails are shot within a few miles of Damascus. Now and then a long line of storks, steering for Russia, crosses overhead, for though there are many storks in Syria during winter, they do not build nests there. The insect-life is proverbially superabundant in the hot season, and strange butterflies imitate the earth in colour and assume fantastic shapes.

The roads that cross these mountains and wind among their valleys are little better than drovers' tracks. A good carriage-road, indeed, runs from Damascus to Beyrout, and the *diligences* and freight-waggons which used it before the making of the railway are still to be seen congregated in pathetic ineptitude at either end of the line. A still more recent road, of equally good construction in many parts, winds through the Kalamun mountains from Damascus to Nebk, where there is a large Turkish barracks and serai (government house). But elsewhere the horse must walk warily if he is to avoid a frequent stumble, and in many parts the humane rider will dismount. Even where the

track is good, the wise will travel by daylight and awake, for in one of the most populous districts, only a few miles out from Homs, we suddenly came upon the hole of a deep cavity, not less than four feet across the mouth, in the middle of the path.

The tracks are in most places towards the west well sprinkled with passengers. But though great trade-routes cross the mountains, the traders go in large massed caravans, and the solitary travellers are mostly agricultural. There are, of course, local centres of trade and commerce, and such names as Suk Wady Barada (The Market of the Abana Gorge) tell of some important traffic. But outside the larger towns little money changes hands, and trade consists mainly of barter, so that the travelling merchant is a rare comer. Except for the pilgrims of the Haj, and the large caravans of long travel, the men one meets are for the most part shepherds, who pasture their sheep or goats in the lower plains until the snow has melted and they may venture up to higher levels. Many flocks of sheep and lambs are driven down the twenty days' march from the rich grazing-lands of Homs and Hama, over those mountains to Jerusalem by way of Damascus ; and in the north-west ranges local shepherds may be met who are well worth interviewing. Some of these, their natural hair in a shining black mass of hanging curls that might have served for the largest wig of Charles the Second of England, were among the most striking figures seen on the whole route.

These are local shepherds, who live in the villages.



CAFÉ ON THE BARADA, DAMASCUS





But besides the shepherds there is another race that dwells upon these mountains. It is the region of roofs indeed, and although as yet no red-tiled and sloping roof may be found so far eastward, yet by the Christians especially, the ancient flat roof of brown earth rolled hard over poplar stems has given place to a new fashion of white-pointed domes from which the rain and snow may pass off at once to the ground. In the whole region of Furklus, whose straggling ranges enclose the rich pasture-lands and ploughed fields that lie over against Homs, supplying its markets, and finding thence an export by the railway, the wide views are studded not only with these white rows of "beehive houses"[1] among the green, but also with clusters of black tents of the encroaching Bedouin. On many a hillside, where large and well-defined squares mark the edges of the fields, such tents are pitched. It is true that these "houses of hair" are to be seen far up the Lebanon, and within eight miles from the sea near Beyrout the writer has seen a family encamped. But their tent was draggled and wretched, a pitiful contrast to the ample folds and wide-spreading stretch of the Eastern encampment. These were poor gipsies, stranded on an alien shore. But from Coelesyria to such outpost villages as Karyatein there is the borderland between town and tent, a territory disputed between the sons of the desert and the children of the city. The wandering Bedouin who visit this region in the spring-time are on their good behaviour at that season, for they are returning to the

[1] Cf. p. 134.

more settled regions then, from the south and east where they have been wintering, and they know that the Turkish garrisons are watching their return.

Yet, throughout all this border, life must be a precarious affair. A couple of months before we visited Karyatein a young Christian was shot by one of the Bedouin who had waited for him just outside the gate, with his revolver in readiness to kill. The men had never met before, nor was there any private quarrel between them. Some former provocation had angered the tribe, and the avenger waited and took the first that came. But up to the very gates of Homs itself, and beyond it towards the Lebanon, cultivation of the land is a curious and exciting game of grab. One evening near our tents in a village twelve hours' riding east of the Orontes, we saw a young camel break loose and head for the mountains. Everywhere on the heights were Arab tents in sight, and if the camel reached them it would never return. Two young men set off on horseback, and in an incredibly short time had disappeared in a little cloud of dust on the horizon. It was an exciting chase to watch, and when, in the nick of time, they had turned the fugitive under the greedy eyes of those that watched for his coming, and had driven him home again, their return was hailed with shouts. Some of those encamped ones have themselves sown the fields by which they watch, and wait upon the borders of them till harvest-time. But that is looked upon as the first step on the downgrade towards civilisation, and a simpler manner shows the better

stock and breeding. That manner is to camp near fields on which other men have laboured, to turn the camels in the night-time into their growing wheat, or themselves to camp in a vineyard at the time of grape-gathering and eat up the whole, the camels tearing at the bleeding roots of the vines.

This sort of thing grows unbearable at last, and here and there you pass the ruins of a village, with only the ground-lines of the former foundations now visible. In Furklus itself, but a few years ago, a raid not only swept the fields but emptied the houses in the village of every piece of brass that they contained ; and many of the families, reduced to utter poverty and altogether disheartened, left the place. Then the Turkish Government awoke, and a garrison of cavalry was established in the finest row of white beehives that now adorn the place. No doubt the inhabitants will pay in many ways a full price for this protection, yet the difference must be worth it. Indeed, when one sees the audacity with which the Bedouin still claim their toll under the very eyes of the soldiers, it becomes difficult to understand how in former days the unprotected villagers were able to live at all. We were fortunate enough, on the journey between Furklus and Homs, to see something of what must be the daily life of this region. Riding across a field, in the hollow of a horse-shoe range of cultivated hills some two or three miles across its breadth, we saw an encampment of some fifty black tents, and crossed over to talk with a shepherd keeping outpost guard. He was uncom-

municative, knowing, as we also knew, that hundreds of eyes were watching the interview from beneath the black haircloth. But other business than ours was on hand. The road climbed along the hillside at the extreme right of the semicircle to cross the range in front. From our stand in the level bottom we could see the three vital points in the game. Far to the left, a mile or more beyond the fifty tents, was the main encampment, where the sheikh and his brothers had set up their tents. Straight ahead, also at a distance of a couple of miles, a bright green patch on the hill-side showed where new corn was springing. But the green was stained with a large tawny blot, not easy to understand, until suddenly we saw it begin to move and change its shape. It was part of the vast herd of camels which were pasturing along the range. Some soldiers, concealed on a hill to the right, had seen the depredation, and already they were spurring their horses at a flying gallop, with the camels in a wild stampede in front of them. Soon the chase was hidden by an intervening hill, but the alarm had been fully given, and for some time many hundreds of camels, in converging lines, were streaming from every direction and being massed at the main camp, while one of the horsemen was riding hard to the tents to deal with the sheikh. This incident, whose only spectators besides those immediately concerned and ourselves were four solemn storks that watched it from a hill-top, is probably no rare one. But if this be the ordinary day's work, life on that borderland can



CAMELS AND DRIVERS OUTSIDE DAMASCUS





hardly be charged with the want of excitement. No doubt both parties would feel aggrieved ; yet, up to a certain limit, it is probable that both Bedouin and villagers enjoy the excitement, and find an adventurous delight in " the dangerous edge of things."

Antilibanus is for the most part a land that has no history. At least two Roman roads crossed it, and along these the line of history ran clear enough for centuries. But the region itself has never played any very important part in the world's affairs. About Arabia and its tribes there is a clinging and persistent mystery, which eludes the keenest search even of such adventurous travellers as have traversed its hidden places. It is doubtful whether any but an Arab has ever yet understood an Arab, no matter how long he may have sojourned in Arabia. Roughly speaking, the Bedouin are divided into peaceable shepherd tribes and robber tribes. Yet in a land where every man goes armed there can be no very clear distinction between soldier and civilian. In a sense, all are shepherds and all are also robbers. Yet while with some shepherding is the serious part of life and robbery but a byplay that amounts to nothing more than the blackmail of bread or tobacco from passers-by not strong enough to refuse, with others robbery is the main interest, and that on a large scale and under a well-organised discipline.

One sheikh of the Bedouin especially interested us, as one of our party had extracted from his knee a bullet received in some desert misunderstanding. We asked for him everywhere, but could hear nothing. Once a

shepherd on a little donkey flatly refused to speak of him, answering the question, "Ask the great men in the tents, I know nothing." It struck us as singular that every time we sent a man to inquire as to his whereabouts, he returned with the same information—about sixty miles away. This went on until we had crossed the desert and returned, and at Homs had given up all hope of meeting Sheikh Mohammed el Milhem. We had wound our way through many a twisted maze of sand-hills, made for surprises, where an ambush might have done its work in the most perfect safety and without redress. Now we were safe on the other side of Homs, making for the mountain gateway of Coelesyria, and as we had given up all hope, our Syrians had given up all fear, of the encounter. Two things were matters of undoubted fact. First, that we had instructed the party to go by the Lake of Homs, and second, that for many days we had instructed them to find Milhem. Neither of these things had been performed. Milhem, indeed, was gone—to Sudud, as we were told with immense relief—but the lake presumably was still in its place, and we struck for that across some waste land. Suddenly black tents appeared at a little distance, and in sheer bravado one of our Syrians inquired of a huge African slave, whose branded face looked down upon him from a formidable height, whether he knew where Milhem was. "I am his slave," was the answer, "and that is his tent." So we visited the sheikh—a feat of which our Syrians will boast round camp-fires to their dying



THE TEKKÎYEH, DAMASCUS





day. The black tent was wide and high. Carpets, luxuriously thick and very beautiful in pattern, were spread ; and cushions, on which we lay around the charcoal hearth, or family altar of hospitality, on which coffee was prepared for us after we had declined a greater feast of sheep. The slaves hung about at a little distance, and came forward to receive at our hands the prepared present of fine coffee and tobacco, carried with us for four days on the chance of this meeting. The sheikh's brothers and other chief men sat round talking, or silently smoking their narghili or cigarettes—the latter being smoked by the aid of a mouthpiece cut from the leg-bone of an eagle. The usual talk went on in its slow fashion—an exchange of items of local and other gossip, interspersed with flattering references on either side to relatives of the others who were wholly unknown to the speakers, and who would have been surprised to find themselves suddenly come into such greatness. A boy was brought in from the women's tent, hobbling on two staves, whom a camel had seized with his teeth and lifted from the ground, seriously injuring the bitten foot. We were permitted to take a photograph or two ; little gifts were exchanged and great ones offered, for we were invited to receive mares or horses as we would. Thus, in friendship and with regret, we parted. All the men except the African slaves had their black hair dressed in long and glossy side-locks, falling beside the ear, some waving and some elaborately plaited. The sheikh himself is a young man apparently about thirty

years of age, black as jet in hair and eyes, dark of skin, and wearing two plaits of hair before his ears. His slightly open mouth showed two rows of large and beautiful teeth. He spoke little, and never laughed, but smiled now and then, though never so as to lose the sense of dignity which every sweep of his folded abba of camel's hair proclaimed. He is sheikh of one branch of the Anazeh tribe, and master not of camels only but of ten thousand spears. At parting he received with great pleasure a small compass and a rhinoceros-hide riding-whip which he had much admired. Yet something like a pang of conscience smote us for starting such innovations in the tents as these. Should the scientific spirit which they might awaken lead him to orientation by compass, and should he find himself performing his devotions towards the Pole star instead of Mecca, the slaves of the establishment might perchance have reason to remember the riding-whip.

A more formidable name was the appropriate one of Slash—one would almost consent to be robbed by a man whose name was Slash! When first we heard it at Damascus, we could not but suspect that it was a mythological name, invented to suit the tale. The near way to Palmyra lies up the valley of Jerud, whose lower reaches are crossed at Kuteifeh. If we chose to go by that way, it must be without escort and against the express orders of the Governor of Damascus. Under such conditions men travel up that perilous vale, not daring to kindle fires by night, even in the



SHEIKH MILHEM.



hollow places of the earth. Not that there is much real risk, for so great a robber seeks for bigger game than the tents and horses of three white riders and nine brown. Yet there is the off-chance that men returning from a raid might serve us as they served a lonely passenger some thirty years ago, whom they stripped to his shirt. When he pled for his helmet, urging that he was an old man, and the sun was hot, and the helmet of no use to the Bedouin, they playfully ran a spear through the helmet, and rode off with it in triumph on the spear-point. To refund the cost of eight horses, four donkeys, and eight mules, with their burdens of tents and provisions, seemed a heavy price for one day's detour, even with the spice of adventure thrown in. So, still questioning whether Slash's real name might not be Harris, we arranged for the longer route among the mountains of Kalamun and so by Nebk to Karyatein. But at Kuteifeh, the first camping ground, all our rationalism was abandoned. When night had fallen, certain villagers came to the tents, and as the quiet footfall of the guard paced to and fro in the dim light of the lantern swinging by the door, we heard them whispering to our men. Little of the conversation was intelligible. It was an account of how they salute the Melik (ruler) of this place and that, but the name of Slash was often spoken, and always as a name of terror. We followed the longer route, and for two days looked upon the hills of Slash's country, some seven or eight miles to the eastward ; and we understood why the villages were enclosed in loop-

holed walls—for Slash has no artillery. It was he, it transpired, who had stripped Furklus bare eight years ago, and in all that region there is not a name so greatly dreaded.

He is, we were told, a man of small stature, with one side of his face broken in. He himself carries only a riding-whip ; but behind him are a score or two of camels, each bearing two warriors fully armed, and a troop of fifty horsemen. The Bagdad post itself has fallen to his attack, and there was word of one famous raid in which he had driven home no less than 18,000 sheep. Whatever may be the margin within which these tales are true, we were informed that for the present our precautions might have been avoided but for the carefulness of the Damascene. Slash was living quietly at home among his mountains, and receiving £30 per month for his sword, hired by the Turkish Government to be on the side of law and order. It is an odd way of doing things, but "East is East."

The town of Homs is certainly one of the most surprising that could well be imagined. The survivor of the ancient Emesa, where so much was lost and won in that most romantic of stories, when Roman Emperor and Palmyrene Queen stood face to face, one thinks of it beforehand as a place of crumbling ruins, between the snows of Lebanon and the desert. Approaching it from the plain, the first feature of it that catches the eye is a gigantic structure like a castle, but too huge to be credible, blocking out a squared foreground against the mountains beyond. On nearer

view, this structure proves to be not a castle only, but a considerable hill, whose entire surface has been squared and encased in the tremendous masonry of a wall several feet in thickness. The level summit is covered with ruins, in which the lower arches are rounded, the higher being of pointed work, as if the Saracen builders had built upon Roman foundations. This view is confirmed by the fact that here, as at Caesarea and elsewhere, the walls are tied and strengthened by lengths of round pillar-shafts built into their mass of rubble. It is one of those Syrian castles which were built, not for a family but for an army, and which oppress the imagination when one tries to picture the times in which they rose.

This, indeed, is appropriate enough. But the town on which you look down from the castle is a strange neighbour for the desert, to which here you bid farewell. From the dainty little village-mosques that dot the green plain with white, you have passed to a city whose aspect reminds you of an English Midland manufacturing town. There is machinery here, and a constant sound of looms. Now and then a railway whistle is heard, and the train strolls leisurely into the station. The very mosques have caught the spirit of the place, and send up narrow minarets of black stone that look like chimneys but for the small white domes that crown them. The 60,000 inhabitants—those of them who are not at work at the looms—employ themselves in their own ways, presenting an uneasy

spectacle of the East jostled and stung by the West. The narrow and twisted streets, badly paved where they are paved at all, and unspeakably unclean, are primitive enough. The shops present the appearance rather of breaches in the brown walls than of any intentional and enterprising commerce. Dead dogs—very dead indeed—lie in public places, but the young men passing by carry roses in their hands. Green courts and rich gardens on house-roofs break the monotony of the view of the city from above. But so also do red tiles here and there, and a short length of that reptilian-like structure of corrugated iron, the bazaar, which has risen in imitation of Damascus. The tents were pitched in an open space, hard by the road, in the midst of the town's houses. The stream of operatives went to and from their work, much as in an English town. But, unlike English townsmen, they squatted when they saw the tents, and, to the number of two or three hundred, sat there gazing on our domestic arrangements from the distance of only a yard or two. Altogether this was the queerest blend of discordant elements that we had yet seen, and at night all round us lamps were lit, and we seemed suddenly to have been transported to a garden of the Arabian Nights, until the strident voice of a gramophone from among the lamps broke the stillness with Parisian music-hall songs !

This, to those white and brown villages through which we had been passing, doubtless represents the great world and modern life. Yet, in this land of strange



MOSQUE, DAMASCUS





contrasts, the villages themselves are but of yesterday, for the green plain is broken by many Tells—conical mounds that mark the sites of Hittite cities. Hama lies among them to the north, once the Hittite capital, now a town shining white in the sun. Yet were these cities ancient in Zenobia's time, and it was among the ruins of ancient empires that she added yet another ruin. The spirit of the snow-white peaks of Lebanon must surely laugh at times as he looks down upon it all from above the open mountain-gate of Coele-syria. The mountains alone seem to have any permanence, and the cities of men come and go.

Not the least pathetic fact about this transience is that in every case it believes itself to have laid hold upon eternity. But it is eternity belittled and cramped by local bitterness, and it represents but a long succession of successes over rival faiths. The main cleavage is, of course, between Christian and Mohammedan. The villages are not, indeed, absolutely uniform, for in a Christian village there may be three or four Mohammedan families, and *vice versa*. But sometimes, as at Abu Daly, there are a Christian and a Mohammedan village of the same name, sitting over against each other at the distance of a stone's throw, and proclaiming their difference, literally, from the housetops. For the Christian village is of beehives, for the better avoidance of rain, while the Mohammedan doggedly preserves the flat roofs of his fathers. Even within these folds there are still further divisions. There are stricter and more open sects among the Mohammedans,

and there are Christian homes among the Kalamun mountains where the brother is a Protestant and the sister a Roman Catholic. It is a far outpost of the world, this scattered land among the desert hills, but yet wonderfully like the rest.



DAMASCUS FROM SALEHÎYEH





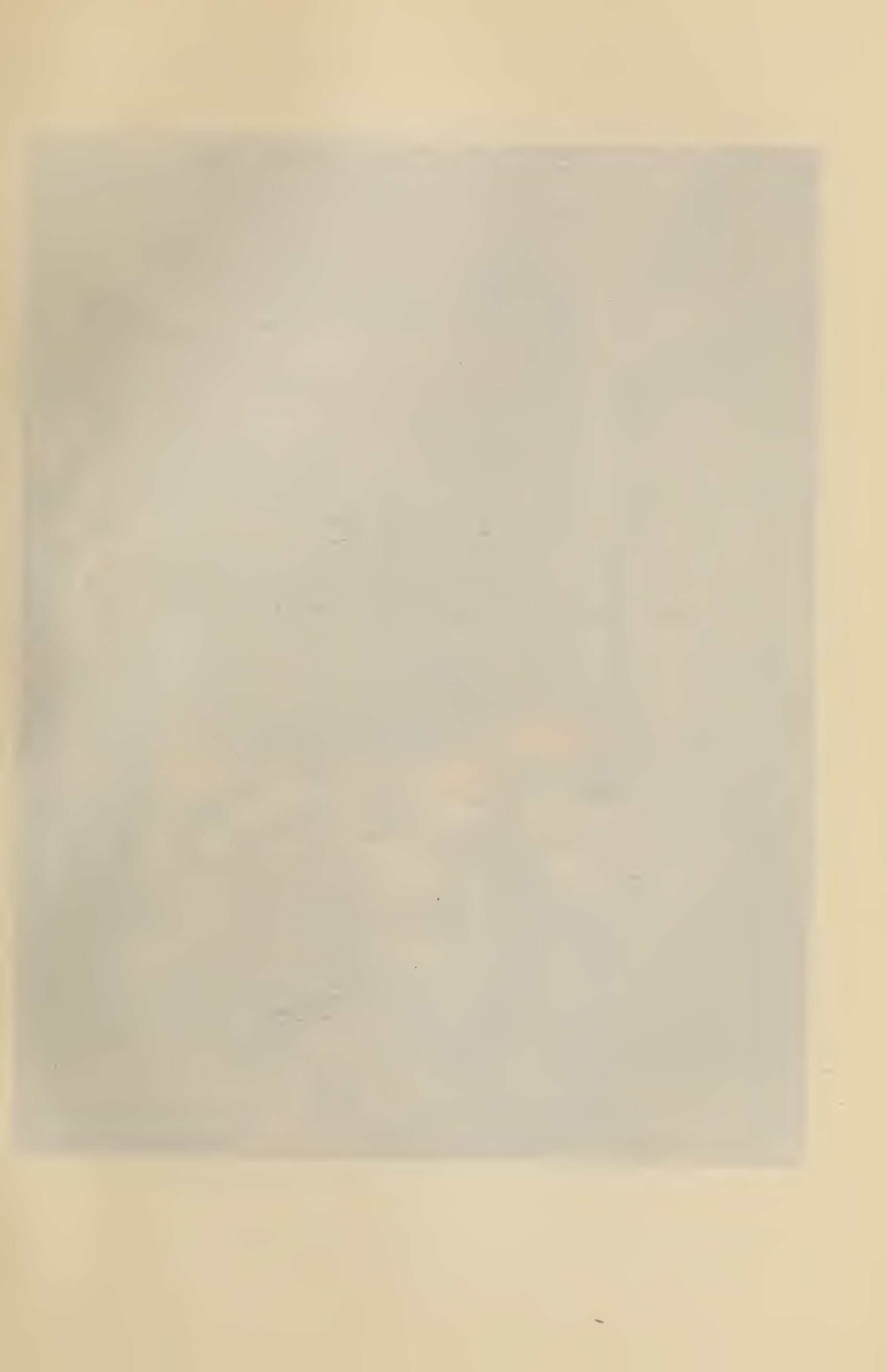
CHAPTER V

DAMASCUS

Before entering the detailed life of the streets and bazaars of Damascus, it is well to see it from afar as a whole. In this respect—perhaps in others also—those were happy who entered it by the road, before the days of railways. The offices and sidings of a railway station are not the ideal entrance to that enchanted place. But he who climbs the height of Salehiyeh, and looks down upon the city thence, may satisfy his soul for once with a realisation equal to his fairest dreams. For setting, there is Hermon to the south, and the scattered ranges of the Jebel Druze that fling their loosely flowing girdle on the eastern plain. Then an open space leaves the north-east free for the indulgence of long wanderings of the imagination, till to the northward the eastern face of the tawny Antilibanus ends in a conical hill which points the way to Palmyra. All this, however, is changeful as the phantasmagoria of dreamland. Now clear, with wonderful illumination of sand, grass and rock by slanting sunset light ; now dim and uniformly colour-

less, or swept by far-distant thunder-clouds. But after all, the setting matters little compared with the jewel it holds. Surrounded by those gardens and orchards which Abana has created, the city lies, pearly white, upon its carpet of green. Sometimes the pearl brightens to sharp-edged silver, and the green is lustrous : sometimes it fades to opal, that seems to blend at all its edges with the mystic dark of a green that is felt rather than seen. But ever it lies there in the utter silence, dreaming through many moods—dreaming, dreaming.

Yet is this wonderful city made up, like the rest of things, of individual details. To enumerate these would be but to confuse them, so many and diverse are they, and nowhere in this world does a guide-book list of sights seem more impertinent than here. He who would get the appropriate impression of the place must first see it whole—that pearly or opalescent jewel of dreams which Salehiyeh shews ; then must he find some way of breaking the jewel, and watching the scatter of its fragments in light and shadow. Fortunately Damascus admirably provides for this. There are two possible ways of driving a landau in Damascus. Either you must walk your horse through the narrow and crooked and crowded streets in the intervals when he is not standing still in front of some obstruction, or you must send him at a break-neck gallop through those same streets, your driver shouting at the pitch of his voice, and the population miraculously escaping all the way. No half-measures are either safe or possible.



IN THE FRUIT BAZAAR, DAMASCUS





Either you must be lord of the streets or their prisoner for the length of that drive.

The swifter method is the one to be recommended. It is in the excitement of that gallop that you see to finest advantage the colours of the city, if you see little else. The dyers' quarter flashes past in purple, the saddlers' in fawn, and the shoemakers' in crimson, as you dash along the open street. Then, plunging into the sombre shadow of the bazaars, new jewels flame out upon your astonished eyes. For the lofty roof has certain holes in it, through which the sunlight leaks in drops and shafts of brilliance "like red-hot lance-heads." Here, where it strikes upon the shop-fronts, there is the glorious blaze of piled oranges, there the paler light of lemon reflected from some shopkeeper's silk robe. And the mid-street of the bazaar sparkles with ruby, diamond, emerald, amber and sapphire, as the head-dresses and silken robes of passers-by come for a moment within the line of light. That is in the sunshine. In rain the drive is a different matter, for the roofs send forth their waters in spouts which descend along the middle of the street, and that violently. The Arab version of our proverb "Out of the frying-pan into the fire" is said to be, "Out from under the leaking roof to under the waterspout in the street."

The absorbing interest of the city is trade, and the men obviously find life an exciting game as they sit there bargaining. The Turkish coinage is of itself enough to keep the excitement keen. Every large

town seems to have its own scale of values, so that you have to remember that it is the Damascus piastre you are reckoning with, and not that of Beyrout. By all ordinary rules of commerce two half-piastres or four quarter-piastres should have the same value as one whole piastre. But that is not the case here. And, further, the value of a coin actually depends on the material you are dealing in, so that a piastre is said to count for one amount in buying corn, and for a totally different amount in buying cloth or leather.

It would be difficult to name an article that could not be bought in Damascus. The slave-market is supposed to be now suppressed, but it may be found if you know where to go for it.[1] For the sale of other commodities the larger emporia present a very imposing appearance. Great yards, stacked with liquorice stems, or those wonderful khans where in the dark of lofty domed chambers innumerable bales are piled, suggest the extent of the transactions. No spot in the city is more impressive than the bazaar of the silver-smiths. A very spacious hall, not unlike the general appearance of an engineer's shop, is closely packed with little stalls, where each man sits cross-legged beside his safe and blow-pipe. He makes no parade of his goods, but laying aside the blow-pipe draws forth from the safe the most astonishing array of precious ornaments. There are rich amber necklaces, rings and chains of beaten silver, charms that have been

[1] It is said that the price of a child lately offered for sale near Damascus was five sheep and a goat.



STRAIGHT STREET, DAMASCUS





worn in the black tents for nobody knows how many years. Many of these have empty clasps from which the jewels that formerly enriched them have been already drawn and sold ; and among the filigree and chain work of Arab manufacture there is many a chain of France and Austria, and the unskilled purchaser had better put himself under the protection of one who knows.

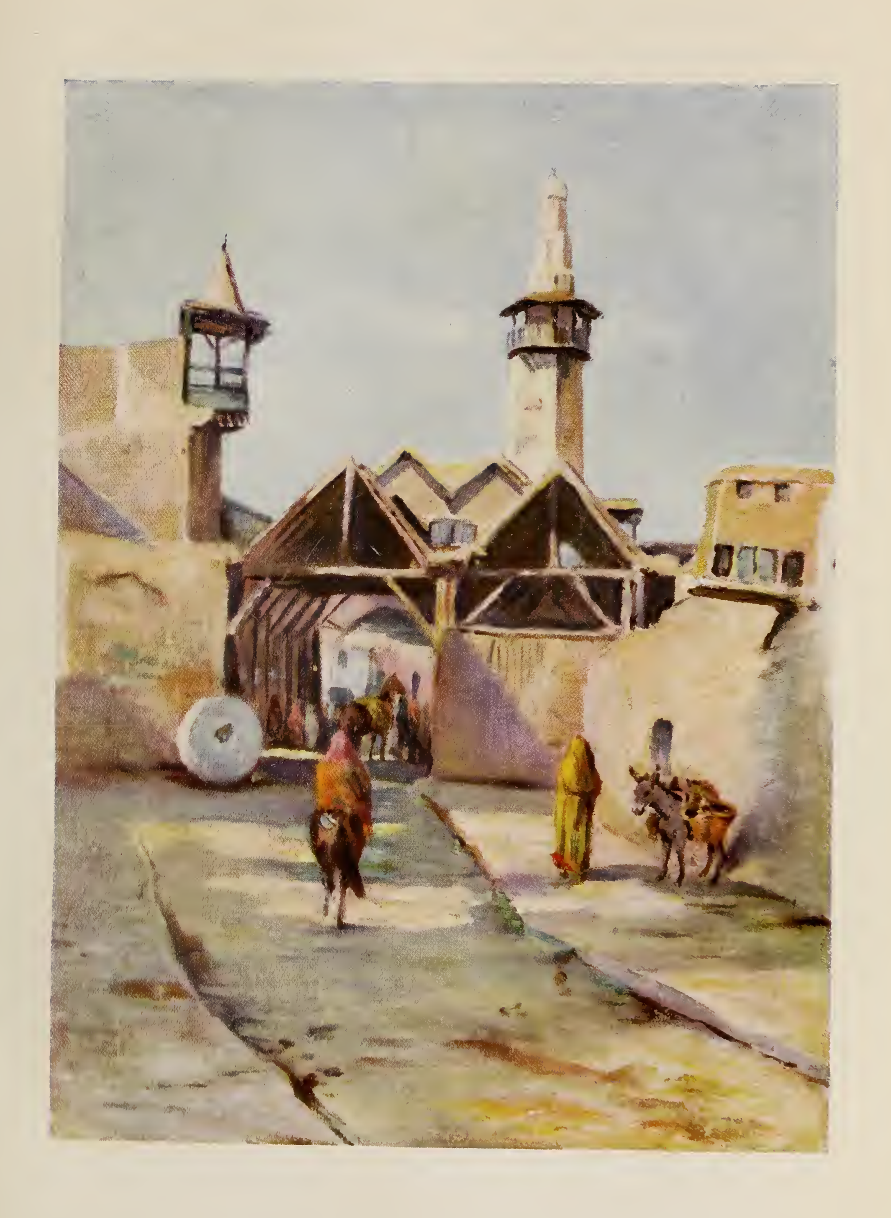
Trade is a game, and it is played as a rule with great good-humour. The seller names his price and you name yours. Then you begin the compromise between them, and many harrowing details of poverty and impending ruin are rehearsed before the final sum is adjusted. Or perhaps the deal comes to an *impasse.* Then you change the subject and buy other things to win the dealer's favour, while he plies you with coffee and cigarettes to win yours. Then you, or he, or both of you, revert to the original subject ; and so the day goes by. But business slackens early, and in the late afternoon most of the shutters are up. The sporting element is probably almost as essential to the dealer's heart as the actual gain. There was one man in Damascus who regularly did business until he had made the sum of nine piastres (about 1s. 8d. sterling), then, no matter what time of day it was, he shut up his shop and went home. There is poetry as well as business in the hearts of these men, and their proverbs punctuate the arguments. "The wind rises and blows, then falls again—so money comes and goes with us." "Misfortune is a mosquito that bites your hand once, but mine it bites three times."

In Damascus, if trade is a game, public life generally is a pageant. Here are the city ladies, walking invisible in their black shrouds beneath which white-stockinged ankles twinkle; there the Bedouin peasant women, gorgeous in blue mantle or black and yellow stripes, and accompanied as they go by the incessant tinklings of silver ornaments. Rich men walk the streets in silks of dazzling colours, and poor men set off against the rich brown of naked flesh some rag of green or purple. There goes on his donkey an ancient philosopher, deeply read in Arabic lore, for he is noted for the size both of his library and his harem—a quiet man in grey, bearded and unobtrusive; there, upon his blood-mare, prances a villager in European clothes, like some city clerk on horseback, but for the wonder of his horsemanship. Foreigners are there, drifting past in endless succession, talking not each other's language, nor curious in each other's lives, but with the eyes of children wide open for the colour and the changing scene. One soon loses the sense of the reality of it all, until the drift is over and the streets deserted, and the pageant laid aside until to-morrow. Then indeed may come back the thought of these people of the phantasmagoria, thinking their own thoughts by the olive-wood fires of houses, and planning out their own ways through the future.

Is there, then, anywhere the simple reality of human life in the city, with its common hopes and fears? or is it all an alternation of game and pageant? Three things there are which offer some sort of answer



BAB TUMA, DAMASCUS





—Law, and Death, and Religion. Law is represented by the Turkish barracks, under the slope of Salehiyeh. Of that, one dare say but little. It is a land of misunderstandings and suspicions. Whispers founded upon a mistaken word in a telegram may close a career for ever. He who has become suspect disappears behind shuttered windows or into the dangerous breadth of the world, and he will not again be seen. There is, indeed, the Young Turkey party and the wickedness of Reform, that have come to trouble these later times. But the telegraph and the rifle can be used by surviving antiquity for its own ends, and the printing-press can disseminate darkness as well as light. It is requisite for a great man to have a certain amount of intelligence, but it is supremely dangerous for him to have too much. To think cunningly among many rumours, to adopt just so much of the new world as will match one against the wiles of the unsophisticated, these are the arts by which men live. The pageant includes all this, and there are very crimson patches in it. But in the main this too is a game. Authority is heavy with sleep, and when it wakes for a moment it strikes drowsily, as one that has had evil dreams. It is the part of the lowly to avoid the blow. And this too is a game, and an exciting one. The Eastern heart knows perfectly well what risks are in the playing, but the zest is worth paying for.

Death would seem real enough, running its iron wedge far in among the splendours. The cemeteries lie outside the walls, their vast untidiness relieved

by gorgeous tombs dropped apparently from the sky; for there is no attempt at orderly arrangement, although many of the tombs are lavishly adorned. How the dead have found their way to these tombs is no man's concern but their own, except that there has been a funeral, with lamentations paid for, and such colours of shroud and followers as have heightened the city's pageant for that day. Pageant and game again! for kismet destroys the sense of reality. If the man sickened, who could help that? If it was in the heart of his enemy that he should die, the enemy and he alike are but pawns on the great board. All this was willed, and every man's last part in the pageant will one day be played, and his game will be ended. So long as fatalism and the fantastic quackery of native medicine are all that men have to set against disease, the sense of unreality persists. The cholera, *e.g.*, is supposed to be a fly in the blood, and, the obvious remedy being to kill the fly, the medicine for cholera is a decoction of spiders. This on the one hand, and on the other hand a fatalism so ghastly that every sacred well like that of Mecca becomes in cholera time a horrible centre of contagion, sick and whole bathing and drinking together in the same waters. Such dealing with life and death cannot rise above the sporting interest of the great game.

Yet there are reserves of tenderness behind all that, waiting to be drawn upon, and death and sickness touch deep human chords here as elsewhere. Love is behind these shutters, and at bitter war with pain



TOMB OF SITTI FATMEH, DAUGHTER OF MOHAMMED, MEIDAN, DAMASCUS





and death. The reserves of tenderness have been set free more by the medical missionaries of our own and other lands than by any others. There are many of them, and Roman Catholic and Protestant are one in this. When death and life hang upon the operator's skill, the surface differences are forgotten, and men work together like brothers for the end they have at heart. The results of such work cannot be tabulated either in lists of cures or of conversions. By two things they have drawn out the sense of reality in men regarding sickness and its cure. First, they have shown a rational procedure, instead of an arbitrary kismet. It is for this more than for all else that the out-patient room, the dispensary, and the operating theatre stand. These have drawn the whole question of disease and cure into the region of cause and effect, and the East is waking from a dream of fate into a waking world of hygiene. But they have done more than that. A poor woman in hospital had been blind with cataract for a long time. She was cured by operation, and when the bandages were removed the surgeon asked her what she saw. "I see thy face," was her answer. It all lies there. Men and women in the East are finding veils withdrawn at last that have hid from each one the face of his brother through many centuries. The gratitude of the patients to their healers is manifest on all hands, and their implicit faith in them. When life is seen to be managed on rational principles, the hearts of men find room to expand. They look on one another with open eyes and discover

that they also love one another. That is neither pageant nor game. It is the great reality.[1]

But what of the religion of Damascus? No one who has seen either the start or the return of the Haj, the grand annual pilgrimage to Mecca, will remain in doubt as to the pageant element in the religion. Even in Cairo, the railway station is decorated with innumerable flags for the return, and the fantastic trappings of beasts and men suggest a strayed circus; while at night the Dervish processions may be seen, with blood streaming under the flare of the torches, and the howling of them may be heard afar off. But Damascus is the gathering-point of the great pilgrimage, and its point of dispersal. No one who has read Doughty's *Arabia Deserta* will ever forget its opening description of the start—the camel-drivers "upon the silent great shuffle-footed beasts, they hold insolently their path through the narrow bazaars; commonly

[1] Even the dogs are not wholly excluded from kindness. Dogs are everywhere, the famous dogs of Damascus. While they are puppies they are treated as pets, and kept by the children within the houses. When they grow up, they are kicked out, to find a living in the street, and save the city the expense of scavengers. They run in packs, and each pack must keep to its own quarter. A stray dog that has wandered beyond its district is instantly set upon by the local pack, and must either fly for its life or be torn in pieces. Many of these dogs are diseased and present an appallingly repulsive spectacle, but by no means all of them. They are of no particular breed, and have come to a pretty uniform type of yellowish-grey dog about the size of an average collie, which the excellent Mr. Daniel Dyce might well describe as "pure mosaic." They are much screamed at and their lives made a burden to them; but sometimes, in a quiet lane, a Damascene may be observed feeding and petting them in the friendliest way. On the whole, they probably prefer the risky freedom of their lives to any more civilised method of existence.



GREAT PLANTAIN IN THE BAZAAR, DAMASCUS





ferocious young men, whose mouths are full of horrible cursings ; and whoso is not of this stomach, him they think unmeet for the road."[1] The camel-masters "are sturdy, weathered men of the road, that can hold the mastery over their often mutinous crews ; it is written in their hard faces that they are over-comers of the evil by the evil, and able to deal in the long desert way with the perfidy of the elvish Beduins." They gather outside the city, to the number of several thousands, and for some thirty days will obey the starting gun in the morning, and the halting gun at night. Woe to him who falls behind on that march ! Never again shall he return to tell the tale that were doubtless better left to imagination.

The Haj Railway has already changed much of all that. The old-fashioned folk of the desert object to it, and scorn the idea of a pilgrimage which is done behind a steam-engine. But of that—foot or railway travel—we saw nothing, but only the return of the holy camel and the pilgrims who had followed it, in the Meidan of Damascus. This crowd was the densest we had ever seen. The whole street was packed with it, moving in two streams in opposite directions. To one of these we committed ourselves, and flowed rather than walked for about a mile, until we reached the house of a courteous and friendly man,

[1] The Haj is a matter not of religion only but also of trade, and the pilgrims bring back merchandise and slaves. In the later "seventies" the cost of the annual caravans to Damascus was about £40,000. (Wilson, *Picturesque Palestine.*)

a doctor, who, refusing all reward, brought us to his upper chamber, where some twenty or thirty Damascenes were already gathered. From that high place for two hours we watched the crowd. There was no noise and no rudeness, but perfect good-nature. And surely all the men in the world passed by that house while we were watching! Every colour of the rainbow, every cast of feature, every suggestion of the varieties of character and experience was there. It was indeed "the flowing, flowing, flowing of the world." Every door and window of the long street was full of faces, and on the roofs of all houses were crowds of women, who seemed to have alighted there like clouds of doves and crows. It was a welcome holiday for them, and they laughed and chatted in their childish fashion, confident that the eyes they feared were elsewhere. At last the bands of music and the soldiers appeared, followed by the leader of the Haj, gorgeous beyond all words, on a superb camel. Then came the great beast that bore the Holy Carpet, swinging his massive canopy of gold and green slowly up the street. That was all. The spectacle was over, and the crowds melted behind it as it passed.

Yet that procession gave the key to Damascus. Seen from Salehiyeh, it lies, a round silver-white star on its green mat of velvet. But one long ray points southwards, and the silver city streams far out from the Mosque along that one direction. That ray is the Meidan—the first stage of the great Haj road.



RETURN OF THE HAJ FROM MECCA TO DAMASCUS





Houses have naturally risen along that line, and the Haj has been the reason of them. Never did natural processes achieve a finer or truer symbolism than when they set the white star of Damascus thus shining towards Mecca.

As a pageant, the religion of Damascus is great and indisputable. Beyond that, is it a reality or a game? The most obvious answer will always be given when it is seen in opposition. As a battle-cry there is all the reality in Islam that there is in fierce and savagely courageous war. In the corner of one of the side chapels of the Grand Mosque at Damascus stands the Sanjak, or "flag of religion," and that at least is sacred indeed. One of the great spectacles in the land is the sight of the muezzin shouting out the call to prayer from the minaret in Jerusalem, over the heads of the dense mass of Christians clustered at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. No one who has heard that, and felt its passionate strength and ferocity, can forget the suggestiveness of the sound. "There is one God, and Mohammed is His Prophet"—where the sense of enemies has put the bite as of a sword-blade into that cry, it is no pageant nor game that is going on. Soldiers on the march, shouting "Din Mohammed din es sef" ("The religion of Mohammed, the religion of the sword"), mean what they say, and in battle would mean it to the point of frenzy. So far can this rancour go, that the East is full of monuments of such fanaticism. The Mosque of Ismail Pasha's mother stands unfinished still in Cairo. Our

guide informed us that it was planned by an Italian architect, and after vast sums had been expended on it, it was abandoned because the Italian was suspected of having introduced some Christian symbols. Hard by it stands the Mosque of Sultan Hassan, with its colossal walls and arches, built at a cost of £72,000, from stones carted from the second Pyramid. It also was built by an Italian engineer, and there is a tradition that his hands were cut off when it was finished, that he might never build a second like it. There is reality there, if there be little of what most men take to be religion.

But here in Damascus, all is quiet now and there is no fear of Christ. The Mosque was formerly a Christian church, and at its main entrance had a three-fold door. The inscription over one of the arches was, "Thy Kingdom, O Christ, is an everlasting Kingdom." Over a second arch ran the text, "God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about Him." For many years the former inscription has been famous as a sight for all Christians visiting the city. Recently some alterations were made in this wall, and the latter inscription was obliterated for ever. But the authorities did not think it worth their while to touch the other. It is true that the Japanese war aroused much interest, and a few excitable people hailed the victory as an opportunity for driving the Christians out of Syria, but that cry never became a movement. When Islam is strong it has often been



MOSQUE OF THE HOLY FLAG, DAMASCUS





tolerant among the Arabs. "It was," says Conder, "the cruelty, not of Arab Moslems, but of the fierce Kharezmian invaders who seized Jerusalem—a race of common origin with the Turks—which roused the fanatical zeal of Europe and gave cause for the first Crusade. . . . The tolerance of the religion of Islam, as set forth in the Koran and as practised by the early Khalifs, was moreover far in advance of the narrow hatreds of the numerous sects of Eastern Christians. After the conquest of Jerusalem by Omar, we find the holy places left freely accessible to the annual influx of pilgrims, and the monks and priests of the Greek Church still allowed to hold possession of their churches and convents." There have been, of course, many changes of mood in Damascus since then, and the massacre of 1860 is not yet forgotten. But for the present at least (and this spirit seems to have been rapidly advancing of late years), all is good-humour and smiling acquiescence. Less than ten years ago, a Damascene was almost killed by the mob for attempting to photograph the ruins of the Mosque after the fire. We set up our cameras unmolested, and obtained time-exposure views of the most sacred of all shrines, and the very mihrab (praying niche) and pulpit of that same Mosque. Here, dreamy and secure, the call to prayer floats over an unquestioning city, and there is nothing about the mosques to remind any one of a bitter piety or a fanatical attachment.

Again, there must surely be some reality where there is so lavish an expenditure. The mosques are

endowed, and many of them are very rich in property. In the eloquent words of a dragoman, "People leave their houses to the mosques when their children are finished." But much is given before the families have become extinct. No fancy fair has been needed to rebuild the magnificent Mosque of Damascus,[1] nor to inlay it with priceless mosaic, nor to cover its floor with still more superb carpets. If its coloured glass is execrable, that is probably a matter rather of taste than of expense. At the hour of prayer all avenues to it are thronged with men. Strangers from many lands, grave with travel and silent as in a far country many of them no doubt are, but many others are Damascenes; and not a few reverent and exalted faces bear the aspect of genuine worship. The tomb of Hassan and Hassein is in far Kerbela, a place of many pilgrimages, where the late Shah of Persia directed in his will that his body should be buried. But their heads (or what does duty for these), are preserved in the Damascus Mosque, and any one can see the genuine reverence with which these and other relics are approached and touched by the faithful. The devotion of these worshippers recalls Roman Catholic devotion at its best. Yet there is a difference, for the Moslem faith is wholly destitute of the element of

[1] The Omayyade Mosque is only less in sanctity to the mosques of Mecca, Medina, and Jerusalem. It was called after Ibn Amwy, the son of a little slave girl. The higher classes go to the mosque only on Fridays, having places for prayer in their own homes. To the lower ranks the mosque is open from sunrise to sunset, and it becomes a second home, where they may rest, sleep, or eat at pleasure. (Wilson, *Picturesque Palestine.*)



WALL OF DAMASCUS—TWILIGHT EFFECT





sacrifice. And after all is said, sacrifice is the ultimate measure of reality in religion.

That there is reality here, however, there can be no reasonable doubt. It is absolutely futile to deny that the Mohammedan worships God, and to ascribe all his religion either to national causes or to private selfish ends. But there are few realities free from illusion in the East, and this is not one of them. The dancing Dervishes, whose beautiful mosque with its twin minarets makes one of the finest pictures in Damascus, have been variously estimated. As dancers, and as ecstatic persons whose nervous systems must present interesting features to the psychological as well as to the physiological student, they are all that could be desired. But it is discouraging to read in a recent account of their chief that: "All the wily ecclesiastic's astuteness shone from the countenance of this worthy. I do not know that his wits were especially remarkable, but his unscrupulousness must have supplemented any deficiencies, or his smile belied him."[1] It is impossible to escape a suspicion of humbug about the whole life and thought of these people. Let any one listen while a Damascene crowd is being addressed by an orator and watch the faces. They will hear in respectful silence, and now and then nod and utter an exclamation of assent, especially at parts where the duty of truthfulness, or any other particularly unpractised virtue, is being emphasised. Even in the matter of observances—the observances of their own

[1] G. L. Bell, *The Desert and the Sown*, p. 145.

religion—the state of public opinion is difficult to arrive at. Take the one instance of the rosary. Most of the men you meet in the street or the bazaar carry in their hands a string of beads, often of rarely beautiful amber. The string is divided by smaller beads, to which are given the names of *minaret* and *saints*. It is usually stated that these are rosaries, and that each bead represents one of the ninety-nine names of God, which the pious Moslem edifies himself by repeating. Yet you will find Mohammedans who will assure you in all good faith that these rosaries have nothing to do with prayer at all—that would be against the Moslem spirit. In Ramadan men are not allowed to smoke all day till sundown. They miss the cigarette in their hands, and carry these beads to play with instead. Others again will tell you that there are two kinds of these strings of beads, one for prayer and one for the play of idle fingers.

Pageant, game, and reality of human life, with its throbbing heart and its infinite aspirations—all go to make up the mysterious life of Damascus. But it is not for any Western man to separate between these, or say when one begins and the other ends. For life, even to him who lives it, is in Damascus a strange medley of reality and dream. Changes are manifest enough, and it would seem as if in a few years there will be little left of the ancient life. Already the power-house is built at the falls of the Barada for generating electric light for the city, and it is said (but may Heaven



A MERCHANT, GRAND BAZAAR, DAMASCUS





interfere !) for running electric tramcars round its walls. Already, you must look well to all your purchases, for Damascus is well supplied with the manufactures of Birmingham and Manchester, and the Arabs are preferring the most atrocious of these to their own infinitely better stuffs.

Still, as yet Damascus sits there, receiving the life-giving waters along their seven channels led off at different altitudes from the valley of the Barada rich in flowers and grass. In her own great ring of gardens she sits, and the bougainvillea hangs in clusters beside her fountains that flash everywhere. Her ancient walls of stone enclose her, and new walls of mud built like concrete within wooden blocks and stamped firm by the naked feet of men, divide into properties that ring of magnificent and lofty trees that make the setting of the pearl. Poor men sing in her cafés on the riverside, and rich men pay their visits to the governor, and the city seems unconscious of the change that is coming upon her. There is no need to understand things, if one may dream instead.

She dreams of far distances and of great vistas of time. Of far distances, for here is a centre and meeting-place for the ends of the earth. Her streets are for ever trodden by the feet of strangers. This one is from Homs on the Orontes, this from Aleppo, this from Mosul (the ancient Nineveh), and this from Bagdad. Many are the Bedouin, uneasy tarriers within walls, whose wild eyes are the eyes of the hunted until they have regained the friendly desert. Camels are kneeling

to-day in her stifling khans, which to-morrow will be but lessening specks on the eastern horizon. So she dreams the dream of the wide world, and sits waiting for travellers to come. As for the West, its tourists are regarded in the same way as its cotton handkerchiefs and electro-plate—useful in their way, and utilised, but incidental.

In the midst of the generations of time as of the distances of space, Damascus sits, at once complaisant and aloof. Her walls are of ancient blocks below, and above of smaller stones no older than the Saracen invasion.[1] Their moat is traceable here and there, but has long since been filled up with debris. The side arches at the end of the Street called Straight indicate a time when there must have been a colonnade and chariot drive. The castle stands "outwardly formidable, but inwardly a ruin," in the midst of the city. If the stones of Damascus could speak, they, better than those of any other place, could tell the story of the world. There is a little garden, under the shadow of the Great Mosque,[2] where the tomb of Saladin stands in perpetual twilight. Close beside the tomb, in a recess in the wall, hangs the bronze wreath which the German Emperor gifted, with the inscription "Verily the Lord loveth His saints." It is permissible to see a humorous element in this, which is not diminished by the fact that a cross

[1] The Saracens destroyed Damascus in 744 A.D.

[2] This tomb, with its richly decorated mausoleum, was built many years after Saladin's death. He died in the Citadel, and his body first rested there.



TOMB OF SALADIN—EXTERIOR





hangs from the wreath, and that that cross nearly provoked a revolution. Yet there is surely some fitness in things that has made Damascus the receptacle of so strange a gift. Here two Emperors met, one standing for the ancient chivalry and the other for many ideas and ambitions as to the future of the East. It is a curious fact that this silent sphinx-like city holds at its heart the tomb of the one and the wreath of the other.

Sphinx-like—that is Damascus. It looks out alike at the East and the West, at the time past and the time to come, and who may read its riddle? It looks on the ancient desert and the encroaching West, indifferent to their good and evil, without curiosity, or desire, or regret, or foreboding. Here if anywhere, should be the answer to the question whether the old times or the new are better. There should be much knowledge that would put many questions to rest. But if the city knows, it is silent. Sinister in its simplicity, cynical and yet not unkindly—dreaming its ancient dream amid the hammering of the modern time, as of old it dreamed amid the cannonades. Pageant and game and reality—and who shall tell which is predominant in its drowsy beauty? It has been said of Boston that it is not a place, it is a state of mind. Still truer is the epigram of that far different state of mind, Damascus. It is, in part at least, the state of mind so happily described by Fiona Macleod, of that "untoward race which is content to live because of the dream that makes living so mysteriously sweet and poignant; and to dream, because of the commanding immediacy of life."

CHAPTER VI

OASIS VILLAGES AND ARAB LIFE

So long as the traveller remains in Damascus, he feels himself as yet safe and uncommitted to the East. With all its barbaric splendours and its tales of danger in the streets, it stands in strong contrast to the land beyond it. From the lofty platform of Salehiyeh, or the minaret of the great mosque, you look beyond its silver maze and across the wide caressing belt of its green environs, to where the hills stand out from lilac haze beside the Atebeh marshes or encounter great washes of rain-cloud under a cold light. One hill especially holds the eye and kindles the imagination. You see it from the minaret in the far distance to the north-east across the Catholic and Protestant mission-houses that lie like islands in green seas of verdure beyond the walls. All the way until you reach it, it dominates the further view of the great road. It is but a modest cone of grey, rising only a little above the undulating sky-line of the range. Yet it is probable that no landmark on earth has called so many wistful people to the East as that has



COURT OF THE GREAT MOSQUE, DAMASCUS

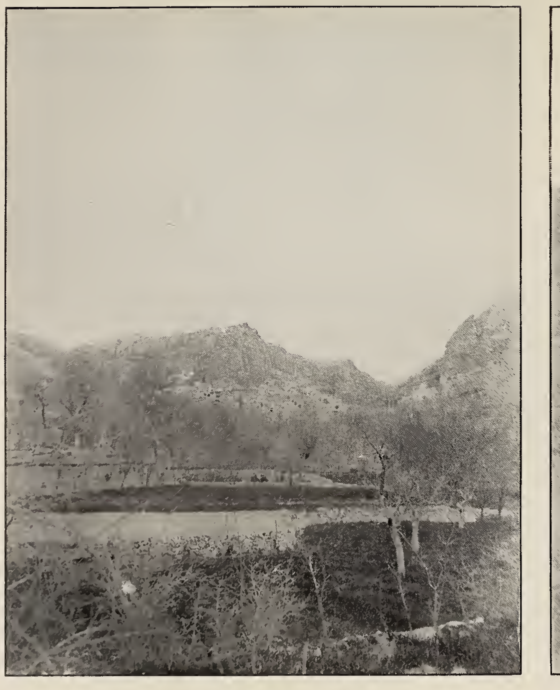




done. For there the road (at this point, and onwards as far as Nebk, a broad and well-made one), leaves the great plain, and climbs to northward, winding through the mountains to the first of those low passes by which it seeks the desert. The highest point of the first day's march is 3300 feet above the sea, that of the second 5350 feet, after which by slow degrees the road descends to Palmyra, whose altitude is 1380 feet. On the heights the towns and villages are frequent, becoming fewer and more isolated as you proceed. Most of them lie flat in great oval plains whose boundaries are those strange mountains of Kalamun described in Chapter IV. Long level strips of khaki-coloured wall, whose flat surface-edge is broken only by the dome and minaret of the mosque, these cities of the plain set themselves out in the evening light with almost theatrical splendour. On the long sweeping descent from the pass to the plain you see them sleeping far away in the wide cradle of mountains whose silver-grey is swept with trailing indigo shadows of the clouds. In the morning they show crimson splashes like the rust of silver plate, for there is some peculiar quality in the atmosphere of these mountains which surprises the eye with the most marvellous play of colour.[1] Karyatein, as we approached it, lay for a time dim and trim in its quiet-

[1] Mr. Mason, in his *Miranda of the Balcony*, has finely and exactly expressed one aspect of such strange and artificial beauty created by the witchery of desert light: "In that clear light Ronda seemed one piece of ivory exquisitely carved and tinted, and then exquisitely mounted on a black pedestal."

coloured regularity, until suddenly an after-glow kindled it to rose and orange, and we entered an incredible dream city, whose very commonplace streets were for the moment "of pure gold." Kuteifeh sank slowly through duskier colours to darkness, while from beside its mosque we watched the mountains across its plain change in the diluted sunlight from purple to colder blue with a band of cloud above, separating the green sky from the aureole against which their summits stood. Over the white lines of distant salt-marshes the detached end of a rainbow hung perpendicular to the earth, like a banner drooping from the ramparts of cloud, or a strayed spirit from Paradise wandering in empty places. Meanwhile the west was blazing in white and gold fires over the black serrated skyline of Antilibanus. Suddenly the light went out from the mountains, and the rainbow was withdrawn. The town, nearly dark now, stood fronting a mountain-range of clay-colour, looking at it like a dead face, as the corpse of one that has tried to speak its message but died without utterance ; and the town seemed to return the stare in uncomprehending silence. Such evenings interpreted for us, not once but many times, the description of the meeting of Karshish with Lazarus in "that old sleepy town" under its portentous evening sky. Where, far to the east, the plain broadens and the mountains recede, between Mahin and Karyatein, three or four such villages, distinguishable by the faint sheen of light green among which their line of masonry lies, may be seen at one time basking



MA'ALULA.



ROCKY COUNTRY BEHIND MA'ALULA.



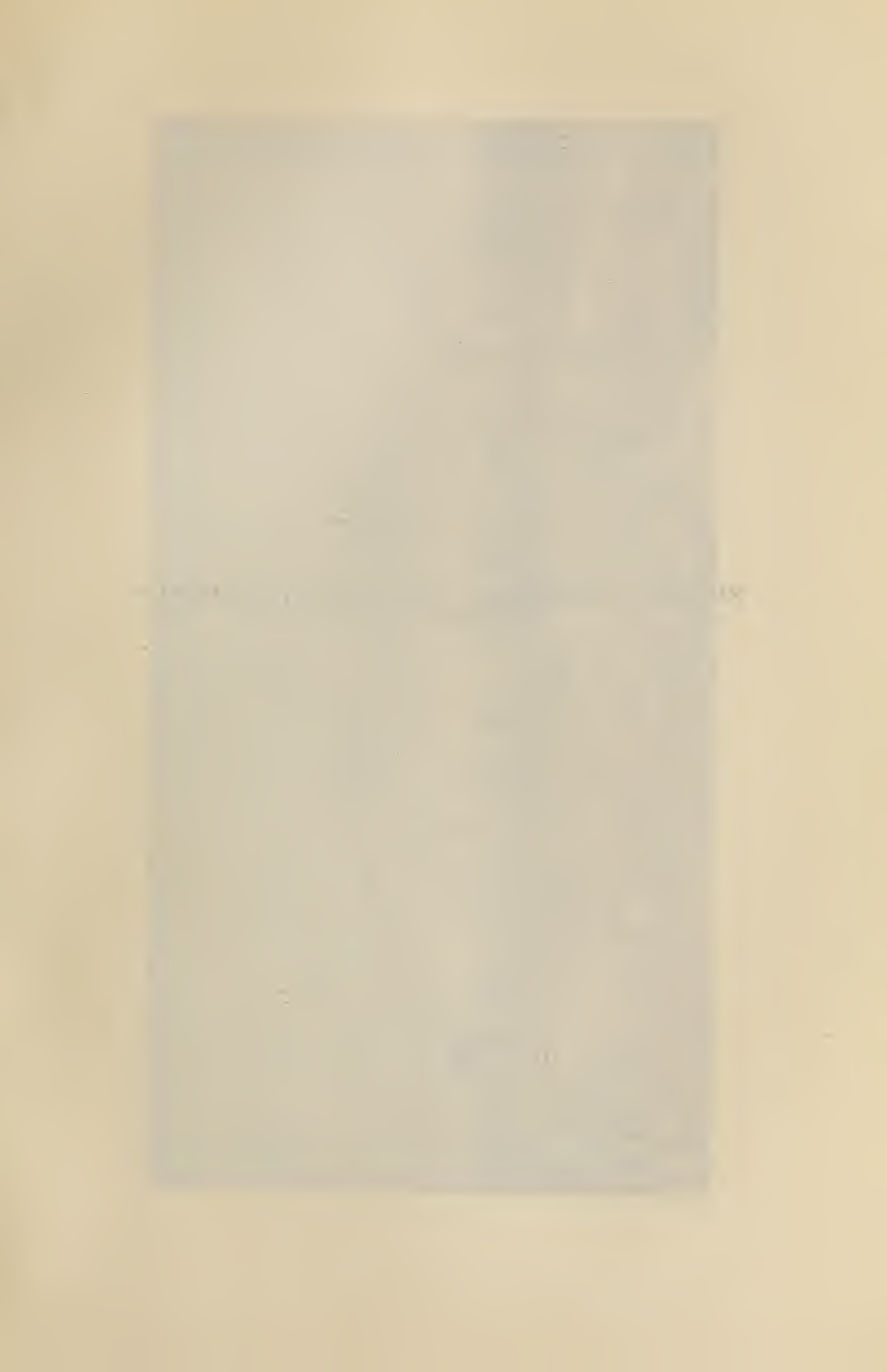
in the sun, flat and low, like brown crocodiles half embedded in the earth. They seemed to us among the loneliest homes of men that we had ever seen.

In striking contrast with those "cities of the plain" are the "cities set on an hill." Sometimes they crown an isolated rising-ground, or cover its entire surface with imposing terraces of level house-roof, rising one behind the other to the minaret on the summit. Such towns are Nebk and Jabrud, with their five or six thousand of population, immensely conscious of themselves and self-sufficient. But far more remarkable are those villages which cling to the crags of precipices half-way up a mountain slope, reminding one of the rock-villages of the Riviera. The most conspicuous and interesting of these is Ma'alula, some two and a half hours out from Kuteifeh, which builds itself along the face of a jutting crag that blocks the end of a long and winding valley. Its houses are fitted into the rock tier above tier until they touch the perpendicular face behind, while a Greek church and a convent, standing clear of the village on either side, keep watch from smaller and still loftier eyries. In the valley down which Ma'alula looks, the fields are terraced in little banked-up squares of green, and watered by a good stream, which keeps alive a large number of shade-trees and orchards of pistachio (or biscob)—blue-grey trees, gnarled like olives. That is in front; but when you have ridden into Ma'alula you find yourself confronting an impassable precipice of rock, which, however, is ultimately found to be cleft with one narrow

fissure, only wide enough to admit a single horseman at a time, and that with difficulty. Through this you wind your way for a considerable distance, to emerge at last in a country sculptured in rounded masses out of sheer rock, unsoftened by foliage of any sort. This grim background for the hill of Ma'alula is honeycombed with tombs and caves, one of which is said to be large enough to hold five hundred men.

A third kind of village is more rarely seen in this region. It is that of the beehive houses. Already, on leaving Der Atiyeh, we had noted a well-cared-for burial-ground, many of whose tombstones were adorned with brightly coloured circular blue tiles which shone like sapphires from their white setting in the sunlight. In that burial-ground certain larger tombs were crowned by tall domes rising to a sharp angle at the apex, and quite unlike the low hemispheres to which one grows so well accustomed in Eastern cities. Such "beehives" are a common fashion in the houses of northern Lebanon, where the flat roof suffers from heavy rains, and the fashion has spread out towards the desert in such villages as Furklus and its neighbours, the desert sentinels of Homs. In the distance these villages stand out like rows of white shark's teeth, as if some monstrous sea-creature had been stranded there, and give a grotesquely decorative appearance to many hillsides.

Such is some general impression of the villages of the mountain and the plain. The increased number of people on the road proclaims them as you approach.



MOSLEM CEMETERY IN THE MEIDAN, DAMASCUS





Fields of vines, grown not for wine but for fruit and raisins, lead to other fields still nearer to the walls, from whose rich green the brightly-coloured robes of peasants shine like great flowers. Thin lines of poplars in many cases divide the gardens, and cast a veil of green over the distant view of the village. As you approach the desert, you feel its power upon the villages increasingly, and those which lie farthest out upon the plains are dusty and unrefreshed. Even the greenest of them, farthest in among the mountains, feel its invasion. Black tents of the Bedouin encroach as far as they dare into the lush grass of river valleys, and may be seen close beside the walls of Furklus, and even in the plains west of Homs. A more troublesome invasion is that of the desert wind, laden with blinding clouds of dust, that gather the foul debris of the villages, and become as disgusting as they are distressing to throat and eyes. These winds rise suddenly, as if upon a signal, and then as suddenly die away, leaving the village in a kind of surprise, as if awakened from a nightmare, and still confused. Yet these villages stand apart from the desert, and the life they have created and keep alive is utterly different from that of the tents. A very distinctly marked life it is ; and as you go from city to city you soon discover that it is never the same in any two of them. Some seem to lack distinction of any kind, but in most of them the individual character of the village makes itself felt, and the impression you form of it as you approach is seldom belied by closer acquaintance. Like all

Eastern towns, they are more impressive in the distance than upon a nearer view, yet in this region there is not the appalling contrast between these views which in Palestine is so constantly repeating its disillusion.

Within the "city" the narrow streets wind in all directions, flanked by high walls of rubble plastered over with brown mud. Few windows pierce those walls, but here and there an arch breaks the even line, and in the recess behind it tradesmen are making clothes or boots, or a shopkeeper sits placidly smoking his water-pipe surrounded with an inconceivably miscellaneous assortment of goods. Low gates, wooden and strongly barred, or patterned with iron studs, lead at intervals into the open courtyards of the more pretentious houses. The oldest, and often the most ruinous part of the village is the mosque ; the newest and most carefully preserved, the Turkish barracks (if the place enjoys the doubtful privilege of a garrison). The mosque of Kuteifeh is surrounded by the wreckage of old walls, its minaret is split and its high gallery is broken ; but the Turkish barracks shine white and regular as the houses of a coastguard station, across a field or two of crumbling walls and fallen debris. After dark the streets are very silent, and from the threshing-floor, on which the tents are pitched outside the walls, nothing can be seen or heard till daybreak. Sometimes we were favoured with an invitation to supper, and the courtesy of the host includes the convoy of a slave home to the tents. Nothing could be more romantic than such night journeys, following the patter of the



INTERIOR OF PRIVATE HOUSE, DAMASCUS





slave's bare feet, while his lantern sent its whirling and dancing shafts of light upwards to the height of the walls, illuminated the swinging folds of his white robes, and flung tumbling masses of shadow here and there about the uneven roadway.

The interiors of the houses are generally plain and bare, and those we visited certainly left nothing to be desired in respect of cleanliness. The courtyard varies in size according to the social position and wealth of the proprietor, and is sometimes empty but for a camel saddle or two, sometimes filled high with whitish-yellow reeds, or stacks of camel dung dried for fuel. Crossing the court, the visitor is shown into the reception-room. In well-to-do establishments this is a spacious and attractive apartment, with a divan of spotlessly white cushions and pillows running round the walls. On a raised part of this divan the guests are seated, while the host seats himself on the lower level. In the houses of poorer men there is no divan, but mats are spread on the vacant space of the earthen floor. Such rooms are generally dark. In one corner stands a great heap of rugs and pillows, which at night, spread upon the floor, will serve as bedding. In another corner is the fireplace, a little oven-like erection of baked clay, which gives a wonderfully comfortable air to the house when the fire of twigs and fuel sends its flames roaring up the ample chimney. Corn-bins, also of clay, and perhaps a jar or two for oil, etc., complete the furniture, except for the elaborate iron pestle and mortar, and the beautifully-shaped long-handled iron

spoon for pounding and roasting coffee, and the blackened coffee-pots on the hearth.

The Arabs are fond of inscriptions about their houses, words being potent charms, and anciently written words the most potent. Where Greek or Roman inscriptions are to be found, they are coveted for building into the walls of houses, and are frequently upside down. In Christian houses, where there are any such in those villages, texts of Scripture illuminated in the approved style and printed in English may be seen, and these also are sometimes unwittingly reversed. The sheikh of Karyatein has a house famous for its inscriptions. Over the outer door is the much-prized Arabic scroll: "In the name of God the Merciful and Gracious, show mercy to those who are upon the earth with the mercy which came from heaven. Fayyad al Faris built this house in the year 1314." Within the outer gate two Palmyrene inscriptions are to be found carved in Greek letters; while in the reception-hall, looking down upon the low-walled fountain in the centre of the floor, ancient effigies of Palmyrenes stand upon brackets.

The houses of the village sheikhs are notable chiefly for the fine lattice-work of their windows, which seems, by its Oriental tracery, amply to justify the semi-darkness for which it is partly responsible. But, alas, the sheikhs are on the down-grade of Western tendencies. The barefooted servants, with their great simple lanterns shining over white robes as they flit silently to and fro or stand in groups about the doors,



COURT OF THE HOUSE OF ASAD PASHA, DAMASCUS





are timeless figures, which might belong to any one of at least four thousand years. The fine rugs of Persia which cover the uneven floors are quite in keeping with the ancient East. The low circular table, with its gold-embroidered covering of white silk is beautiful indeed, and brilliant saddle-bags and native woollen work appropriately adorn the walls. But the invasion of the West is sadly apparent. In the house of one sheikh the silk tablecloth has made way for an American oilcloth with an unspeakably gaudy picture in its centre; and the reception-room is furnished with cane chairs and hung with magenta silk draperies of French design. Almost everywhere, like Aladdin, the Arab has exchanged his old lamps for new ones. No doubt the new ones are of coloured glass and burn paraffin. But the magic of that dimly-lighted life is departing with the old.

No one who has met them can fail to be impressed with the personality of those village sheikhs. Far from those regions which we are apt to consider the whole world, these men represent an aristocracy which was old when our most ancient families were founded. Between the Turk and the robber Arab of the hills they sit precariously in their high places, and if this one or that has been in trouble in his time, it must be remembered that loyalty is a complicated affair in these parts. As a rule they are magnificently built men, tall and handsome in their prime, though old age seems to shrivel them to smaller dimensions when it comes. Fayyad, sheikh of Karyatein, is physically as fine a man

as one could meet. When we arrived before his walls he was in the hills shooting gazelle for a present to us, and he dashed in on his Arab charger, with his robes flowing loose about him below the cartridge-belt in which his Winchester was slung, with a couple of hunting-dogs, lean and swift, beside him. The introduction was a most imposing one, and further acquaintance rather increased than diminished the impression of it. Austere and absolute towards their own people, they were full of pleasantness to their visitors. It was at meal-times that we saw most of them, and found them men who had seen much of life, and who were full of curiosity about the world. Fayyad keenly questioned us about the Algeciras Conference, then in session. News, to him, was a matter of rarest and most exciting interest. It almost made us conscience-stricken to reflect that among our luggage was an unopened *Times Supplement*, now three weeks old, which we were taking with us to read at our destination! They had known Wright and the Burtons. One of them had guided Lady Blunt and her husband across the desert by Jowf to Bagdad, and had accompanied a French traveller to Paris, in proof of which he spoke much to us in a dialect of French which he had constructed for himself, with the letter *b* substituted for *p*, a consonant unknown in the Arabic alphabet.

As guests in the tent these sheikhs were full of politeness, watching and copying with an occasional apology the European habits and manners. They



A DAMASCENE INTERIOR





refused wine and were doubtful even about Apollinaris, but they ate heartily and talked and laughed as if quite at home. Long pauses of silence occurred without embarrassment on either side, for it is the strange practice of Arabia to speak only when one has something to say. The Arab interprets hospitality as allowing your guest to do as he pleases, to eat much or little, to speak or to be silent, to remain awake or fall asleep without offence. But the silence was broken by memorable tales which the guests told with flashing eyes and unceasing gesture. Whatever the public or private character of these sheikhs may be in other respects, there is no question as to their charm as story-tellers.

As hosts, when we accepted their invitation to a return meal, they were if possible still more interesting. The meal itself was a thing to be remembered. The host would begin by asking whether the guests would prefer their meats in relays, or whether every dish should be put on the table at once. The latter plan was chosen, and the host was gratified, for the piled and crowded tables pleased him as he pressed us to partake freely of it all. The servant who had been sent to tell us that the feast was ready and to convoy us with his lantern from the tents, joined the white-robed and silent group of his fellows who stood at the chamber door, like figures that had walked out of an Assyrian bas-relief. The Kadi (or judge), the village schoolmaster, and one or two other local magnates sat in unbroken silence, eating what was

put before them. Piles of rose-leaves were heaped beside each plate that the eaters might regale themselves with the scent between the courses. In the centre stood the lordly narghili, or water-pipe, within whose capacious bowl rose-leaves danced while it was in action. Everything was quiet and dignified, and the meal proceeded, alternately in long intervals of silence and in vivacious outbursts of speech. Among the many varieties of food from which one might choose were always some soup, high-flavoured and oily, rice and minced meat wrapped up and cooked in tender vine-leaves, oleaginous cakes of oatmeal of an inch in thickness, and great bowls of pure white *leben* (a preparation of goat's or camel's milk), with finely sliced herbs sprinkled on it. The meal over, a slave carried round the ewer and basin, and poured water on the hands of all. Then another slave brought a live coal of wood and laid it on the bowl of the narghili, which went its round from mouth to mouth. The smoke is inhaled, in deep inspirations, and the narcotic effect upon the uninitiated is powerful and immediate. After a few whiffs it passes to the next around the table, till it finally reaches the sheikh himself at the head, who smokes it steadily through the whole evening. This ceremony of smoking the narghili all round is a sign of friendship and a pledge of goodwill. The serious business of the evening's smoking is done in cigarettes, which the host piles up beside every guest. They are of Aleppo tobacco if he be a Government official; otherwise of Zahleh tobacco,



A SELLER OF SWEETS, DAMASCUS



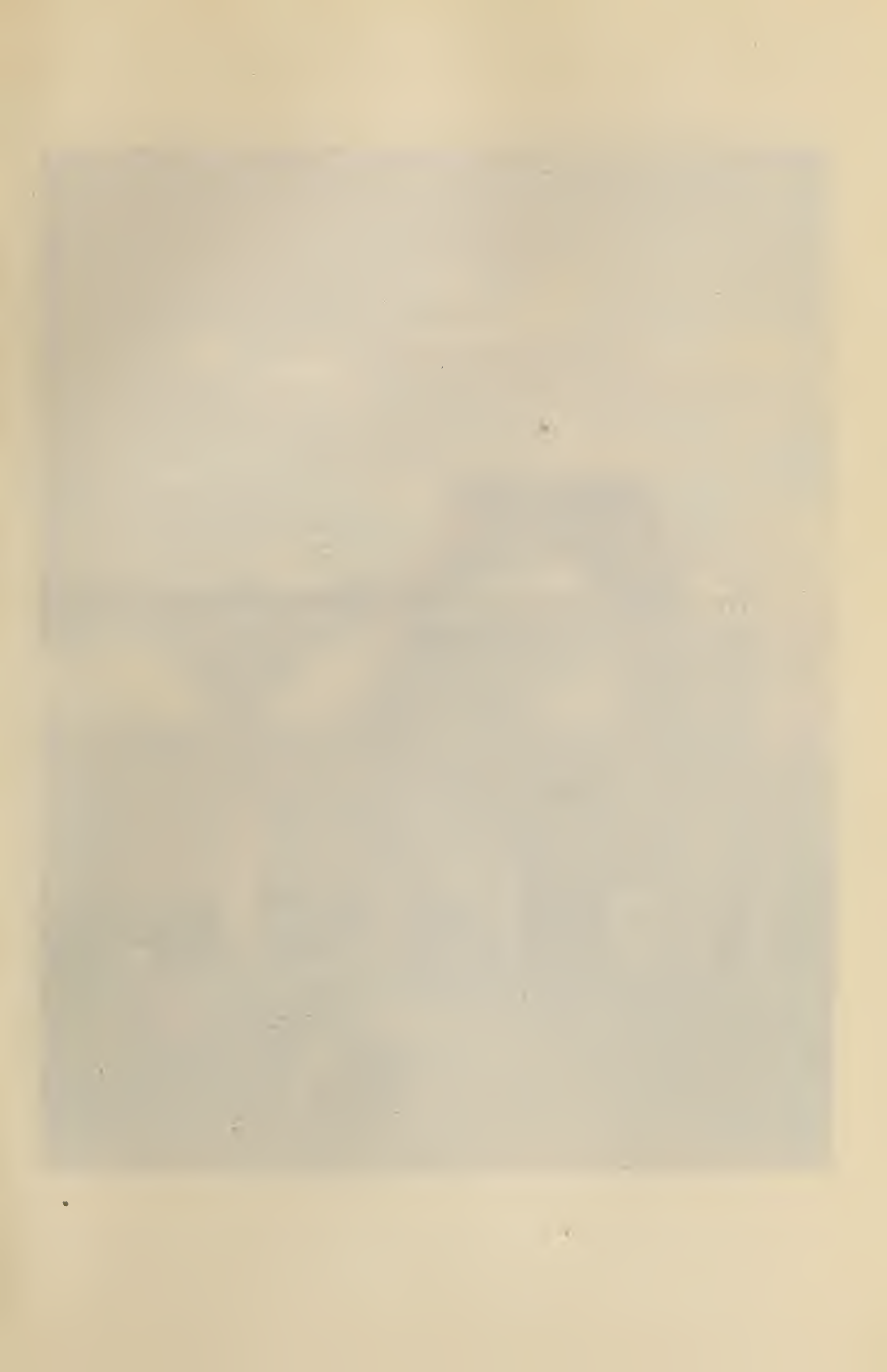


or the regulation Turkish brands. Even in the poorest houses something is always offered to the visitor, and one is bewildered by the variety of sweetmeats—strips of crystallised quince, walnut, and pear—which very humble houses can offer. The poorer people seldom eat flesh, and the words of Jesus to Martha, "One dish is all that is needful," probably represent the average fare. But whether with one dish or many, the Arab's meal is a function of the most serious importance, and they have a characteristic proverb that "All roads lead to the mill."

As for drink, the strong waters of the West, which have already seduced many city-dwellers from the faithfulness of their Mohammedanism, have as yet found no way beyond Damascus. Even those brilliantly coloured sherbets, which do so much for the jewel-like appearance of the bazaars, are seldom found to the eastward, though orange-water is often set before a guest. A samovar is seen occasionally, by whose aid tea, sweetened to the consistency of syrup, is made for special occasions. But the staple and characteristic beverage everywhere is coffee. So great is the honour in which this drink is held, that the preparation of it claims almost the pomp and circumstance of a religious ceremony. The Arab may have given the impression of a quite incompetent nobody, but when his hands have laid hold upon the pestle, and the roasted beans are in the mortar, he is obviously a new man. Assuming the severe air of one who is doing a powerful thing, and who would be a dark

character if interrupted, he begins a tattoo of many variations. The sides of the mortar ring upon the stroke, while the bottom, covered with its layer of fragrant coffee, alternates with its muffled sound. The alternation is like that of kettle-drums, and some of the tunes are extraordinarily clever and pleasing to the ear. This part of the service may go on for a long while, and the longer the time the greater is the honour to the guest. After this notable pounding of the beans, the brazen coffee-pots, with their spouts bent in a long curve like that of a parrot's beak, come into requisition, and the thick brown liquor is three times brought to the point of boiling over upon the hearth. Then cardamom seeds are similarly pounded, and added to the contents of the coffee-pots for flavouring. Finally, the daintiest of small cups are produced, and fragrant thick coffee poured into them, having first been tasted by the host in proof of good faith in the matter of poison. Such a ceremony may upon state occasions occupy an hour, but time is nothing in these unhurried regions, and the drink is worth a longer waiting. It is drunk noisily, with lips thrust into it from above, and the well-mannered guest does not ask for more, but waits for the signal honour of a second asking. When you have drunk, but not before, you are free to depart; which explains why tardiness and not haste in preparation is the sign of cordial welcome.

But if the drinking of coffee be almost a sacred thing, the drinking of water is sacred altogether.



SITE OF THE HOUSE OF NAAMAN THE SYRIAN,
DAMASCUS





No one, till he has travelled from oasis to oasis, knows what water really means. The horses, after a long march, grow spiritless from thirst, and will drink cold tea greedily from their riders' flasks. But when at length they scent the stream from afar, then, pricking up their ears, they throw off their weariness and race for its refreshment. The exquisite cruelty of the mirage is a thing to make even a devout man quarrel with Heaven, and curse the lying earth. And when the mirage actually becomes a pool, as the prophet promises (Isaiah xxxv. 7), then the return to grass and gently-flowing waters of a village is a memory notable for years. The villages are the creation of the waters, and in ancient times their favourite gods were the Baalim of the streams and rivers. Every little hamlet that nestles in its pocket of folded hillside stands in the centre of a thin green line drawn by a rivulet down the length of yellow valley. The larger the rivulet, the larger the village, whose limits are absolutely fixed by this alone, and all the larger towns are entered along a lane of luxuriant vegetation, whose roots are wet from the waters of a full-sized stream.

For the Western stranger, the waters of the East are more treacherous than the mirage which mocks him with their vain appearance. No one can tell with what foulness Nature or man has polluted them, until indeed he finds it to his cost. But the natives are immune, and will drink contemptuously of water green with malarial growth of fungi, or dancing with living creatures plain to the naked eye. Yet each prefers

the waters of his native spring, as David longed for the Well of Bethlehem, and Naaman for Abana and Pharphar. At the Well of Asra, a thirsty Arab of the place cried to us, as he drank, that there was no water like it. "You take a drink," he said, "then eat; then you drink again and are just as hungry as if you had never eaten." Thus water is the bond of patriotism. Men believe in their hearts that there are no waters like the waters of their native village; and, in spite of Naaman and all other Damascenes, a muleteer of Bludan, when he returns from a journey, will cry after his first long draught from the spring, "That is worth all Damascus."

There is an air of health and general wholesomeness about the physical appearance of these desert villagers. Most of them are well-grown and muscular, and many appear to have reached an extreme old age. A greybeard may perhaps be drawing the long bow when he tells you that his father is 118 years of age, and that his mother, almost as old, is still able to walk about—"Like this," he will add, and suddenly fall into a hobbling gait of wiry decrepitude. The air is untainted as it blows across these plains, and the life is very simple. Yet when you travel, as the writer did, with physicians of renown, your tent is besieged with crowds of sick folk. Most of the suffering is in the eyes, though in mountain-valleys many weak hearts are found as well, and everywhere the flesh is liable to terrible ulcers where wounds have been neglected. But after a few patients have been treated the cases



STREET FOUNTAIN, DAMASCUS





multiply, and every one in the village remembers that during the past months he has had some ailment, real or imaginary. Native medicine is in little favour, and small wonder, for its favourite remedies are burning with hot irons and the swallowing of written texts of the Koran. At one village we had been detained for several hours past our intended time of starting, and at last had moved off with a crowd of sick people at our heels, for the day was hardly long enough for the journey. But one invalid was not to be gainsaid—a young man who had lain in his bed for fourteen months and was now very near his end. He directed his friends to lay him, bed and all, across the road, blocking it at a narrow part where the *hakim* must perforce pass ; like them of old, he trusted that at least the shadow of the healer might fall upon him. It was with sore hearts that we rode away, knowing that for him the only healer was coming soon.

In dress the Turkish officials assume the fashions of the West, while the Arabs keep to their more ancient and far more beautiful garments. The women are generally dressed in a trousered suit of dark blue cloth, and many of them are unveiled. The men are arrayed in flowing robes, sometimes of very brilliant colours, but for the most part striped in white, black, and brown. Some of them keep in reserve a Western suit, of which they are foolishly proud, and the transformation from a lordly Arab to the appearance of a shabbily attired European is very saddening to those who see in it a prophecy of future days. As yet, however, the

old custom prevails, and wide-flowing robes and silken head-dress are held in honour. Should any householder wish to show the loyalty of his servants, he has but to remove the covering from his head and throw it on the ground. His servants will lay aside all other tasks and vie with one another in lifting and restoring it. No other man durst have displaced it, and they cannot look upon the sacrilege even when their master has done it. For a man's head is honourable, and its covering is a glory to him, which must in nowise be shamed by contact with the dust.

The wealthier villagers are either farmers of fields of vines and corn, or flock-masters, or tradesmen, or merchants. They do little work if they can afford to hire poorer men to do it, in which case they are exacting masters of labour. The women are employed upon the more menial tasks, both within doors and without. The humbler men walk abroad with heavy-headed shepherds' club or mattock, and when the day's work is over they sit at the doors of their houses, spinning bright-coloured wool or knitting strange garments. The higher sort ride forth on horseback or on asses, and the horsemanship of the Arab retains its ancient fame. They hunt gazelle on the mountains or set gazelle-traps for a *battue*—the long converging walls marking many a hillside with their curious streaming lines. Over low places in these walls the driven flocks of gazelle leap into great pits, hidden until the leap reveals them, and as many as a score are sometimes killed in one such drive. But city-



GROUP OF SYRIANS





dwelling Arabs are a poor second even to the humblest of the shepherds, whose homes are the black haircloth tents, and who fear to enter walled cities and regard all gates as the doors of traps for men. These men, with eyes alert and restless, ride as if they and their horses were of one piece, and delight in wild caracolling that would unseat any townsman. When night falls upon a village all is silence, and soon the lights vanish from the windows. There is little music and no dancing, but upon the occasion of some festival. Altogether these are masters of the simple life, and they are good to see and dwell among.

The children, both boys and girls, are delightfully bright, and to all appearance happy. Precious in the eyes of their parents, they are regarded as the greatest of Allah's gifts, and along with the pride in them as the successors and continuators of the family, there seems to be much delight in their quaintness, and not a little cherishing of their affections. "How many children have you?" a villager will often ask; and whatever be your answer, he will reply, "It is God's gift, two or ten!" Their games are watched with smiles in the evening-time by the older people. Sometimes they play at the imitation of the works they see. On many a far-off spot, outside a city wall, or in some deserted camping-ground of the Bedouin are to be seen rings and squares of stones which children have arranged for houses just as they do among ourselves. In Egypt they may be seen imitating the magic of the sand-diviner, but here this would not be permitted, the

magic of the desert being taken far too seriously for any such lightness to be ventured. At one village we saw an elaborate game, in which two little boys sat facing one another on the earth, feet to feet, while the rest with a running jump cleared this low hurdle. But the feet rose, heel upon toe, and by slow degrees the fingers of the hands were outspread above the summit of the little pile, until jumping clear became a serious adventure. We joined the fun, and tried to induce them to play leap-frog with us, but upon that they looked with manifest contempt, as a coarse and unrefined form of amusement in comparison with their dainty structure of toes and fingers.

The older folk were gentle with the little ones. Peasants working in the fields would often swing the cradle of the family upon a neighbouring tree, and many endearments lightened the hot day's labour. The wild sheikh Fayyad of Karyatein came to us accompanied by his hunting dogs and his little son, a child of but ten, yet every inch a huntsman and a sheikh as he stood with his little black arm thrown round the body of the lean-ribbed hound. Even the poorest children were dressed in fine embroideries and brilliant colours, the head-dress, often of crimson, falling back over yellow robes, while in the black curls of every head some blue bead or sparkling fragment of green glass shone as a counter-charm against the evil eye. Sometimes a blue-eyed fair face was seen among the dusky ones, and occasionally a shock of hair dyed scarlet for some occult reason, and making of a pretty

child a dismal caricature. Yet this also was done in kindness, for the women of these villages, when their charms begin to fade (as they do early), change their hair to this colour in many cases, and present a very weird type of beauty to the unaccustomed.

One little orphan child came to us in a house where we were eating the midday meal at Mahin. His father was dead—a soldier who had perished in some warfare in the Farther East—and his mother was of no account. But he was fat and smiling, and though he was but five years old his adopted father humoured him with a share of the cigarettes we had given. At Palmyra there were two sheikhs, an old and a young. The old sheikh brought to the tents his little girl for treatment of sore eyes, and when she entered her arms were covered with bracelets of silver and mother-of-pearl. She was not veiled, but was shy and frightened, and screamed with terror when the examination began. Some of her sisters are, however, veiled at a very early age ; and a sick child of only six years old, lying with her face uncovered in an hospital, and suddenly seeing a stranger passing through the ward, began lamentably to wail, crying loudly, "Woe is me, for a man hath looked upon my face!" Yet most of the children whom we saw were genuine human children, very natural and full of pleasant brightness. In Damascus, indeed, one small mite, to show his daring, stood for an instant with his face but a little way above our knees and vigorously shouted *kelb* (dog), and then ran to the protection of his father,

whose pride was thinly concealed in his perfunctory rebuke; but that was a quite exceptional incident. The prettiest and most memorable of all our encounters with them was at the evening meal in the house of Abdullah, the younger sheikh of Palmyra. The supper was nearly ended, and the silent, white-robed men stood like statues in the lamp-lit court, when a sudden patter of little feet was heard, and two boys and a girl, the children of our host, scampered rabbit-like across the court. They ran to their father and were caressed and kissed. In turn they took the hand of each guest in theirs, and raising it to their lips kissed it and touched it with their brow. Then, after a little play and many curious glances at the strangers, they vanished, shy and skittish little wild creatures as they were, once more into the darkness.

As to the real character and moral standards of these people, no one would be competent to write who had not lived for a long time among them. One thing is certain, that in every judgment allowance must be fully made for the difference between East and West. Wastefulness, *e.g.*, is a crime of the first magnitude, and you will shock the moral sensibilities of your companions more by washing your face with the remainder of your drinking-water than by stealing or assault. Lying, on the other hand, is hardly regarded in any moral light at all; an Arab will consider it mere politeness to tell a lie at any time in preference to an unpleasant truth, and in a dispute he appears to take



COURT OF A DAMASCENE HOUSE





it as one of the conditions of the game that each man is responsible for detecting the pretences of the other. This, however, is to be qualified by the fact that still one hears of cases in which "the word of an Englishman" is a proverb for inviolability and trustworthiness. So great is the difference in point of view, and so entirely does it permeate the whole fabric of thought and life, that even the most obvious and elementary condemnations may be grossly unfair. Warning of this is given to all whose intelligence is open to impression, by the extraordinary succession of sudden changes of mood and of attitude through which any Arab will pass before your eyes. From a treacherous and cunning enemy he will suddenly become the most hospitable of friends, if some previously undiscovered fact have revealed a bond or established you as his guest. He will lie and act with consummate skill and persistent solemnity till the game is played out and he sees that he is beaten. Then suddenly he will become the most genial of good fellows, and expect to be accepted as such. In the matter of gifts this is specially the case. The Arabs have a saying that "a present is going on a journey to bring back double." That is precisely how a present is understood. Visiting a tent, you are offered sheep, horses, mares, what you will. Nothing is too lordly a gift for the most casual stranger. But everybody quite understands that if you have accepted these profuse generosities you have already crossed the boundary from giving to

bargaining, and the return of an equivalent will be expected as a matter, not of courtesy, but of fair-play. In this, as in much else, a Western may prefer his own usages to those of the East, and may even consider it his mission to introduce changes, but in the meantime he must accept them if he is to maintain intercourse of any kind. Doughty quite freely confesses that he owed much of his failure, and still more of his hardships and dangers, to his refusal to conform; while Burton, whose influence over the people he lived among was supreme, became to all intents and purposes an Oriental long before he adopted the Mohammedan faith.

It is a complete mistake, also, to regard these people as savages. The Greeks lost something by regarding the rest of the world as barbarians, and the English have lost much more by a similar and less justifiable classification. The Arab civilisation is certainly not that of Europe, and in many ways it is inferior to it. Yet in its primitive simplicity it offers at least some points of advantage. It is usual to point to the degraded and miserable condition of woman in the East, yet when one passes from the bitterness of Palestine villages, and the vicious brutalities of the greater cities of the East, out into the open country, a change is felt. Home is an obvious reality, and woman (in the villages at least) no longer a mere chattel. No doubt the more powerful sheikhs exercise an unchallenged licence, and the women of the richer harems are close prisoners; but in the homes of



A COBBLER, DAMASCUS





Christians, and in many of the poorer Moslem homes, there is much that is heartening and companionable in the relations between the sexes. In some cases, though this appears to be rare, there is even an element of romance. A Bedouin woman, if by any rare circumstance she should find herself under the convoy of a strange man, has only to pronounce the sentence, "God is witness between us, I am thy sister." The answer will be, "God is witness, I am thy brother," and there is no further questioning, nor any need of it.[1]

A fundamental consideration in judging Arab character is the insecurity of human life. Everything is casual and every one is careless. If a muleteer is kicked, and picked up unconscious a yard or two away, his fellows discuss quite philosophically the question as to whether he is dead. If the horses shy at a splash of recently shed blood upon the road, and you ask what blood this may be, the answer will be without concern, "Who knows?" East of Damascus every Western traveller carries arms, and sleeps at night with loaded revolver under his pillow. Practically never, of late years, has a European had any real occasion to use his weapon, but if he were known to have none, the chances are he might have such occasion. At Palmyra the three of us one day climbed the steep hill to the Turkish castle, accompanied by a native boy. One of the three, climbing the inner rampart within the moat, entered the ruins, while the other two, setting up a

[1] Compare Merrill, *East of the Jordan*, p. 143.

mark, practised revolver-shooting. The boy instantly leapt to the conclusion that having got our companion within the castle we were about to murder him, and wished vehemently that he had remained behind. The point of view would hardly have occurred to a British tourist, but it was the obvious one for a Palmyrene resident. The sense of insecure tenure of their lives is kept fresh in the villagers by their tales and convictions with regard to the robber Arabs and their raids. Of them they see an emblem in the butcher-birds which may be observed sticking beetles for their larder on the long spikes of thorn bushes. Their villages are protected by rifle-proof walls, loop-holed for defence, and when they go abroad, they arm themselves in the most formidable completeness. Seldom will you meet any passenger, on foot or on horseback, who does not carry weapons. And this very custom must add considerably to their sense of the insecurity of life. In one house a well-to-do native received us with cordial welcome, and proceeded immediately to exhibit to us his choicest treasure. It was a sham Enfield magazine rifle, made in Germany—so careless an imitation that the word ENFIELD was stamped EИFIELD. But he filled it with cartridges, and with fingers horribly near the trigger worked the lever which flung them out one by one about the divan, showing all the excitement of a child with a new toy. Things grew more serious when he insisted on accompanying us on the next stage of the journey, an astonishing spectacle of flowing robes over

a belt that carried innumerable cartridges, and his gun slung over his shoulder or laid crosswise in front of him upon his saddle. He was mounted on a superb Arab mare, and it will be long before we forget that twilight ride. From time to time he fired off one of the cartridges in his magazine, while he rode at full gallop. Then he would draw rein, and set the mare dancing where she stood, while the rifle barrel swept the horizon in plunging leaps, covering us each in turn as it danced from the sunset to the darkening east and round again. For these children of the desert life is a very casual and uncertain thing. They trouble themselves little about any future either for themselves or for their nation; and, with nothing to look forward to, they live frankly for the present hour, undisturbed by ideals and unburdened by the tyranny of scruples.

In those regions, while there is much hardness of natural conditions, there is also much relaxing, and life, released from the tension of more immediate fear, expands into an easy pleasantness. Smiles abound, and are always ready to break into loud laughter. The humour of the East is sensitive to any sort of ingenuity, and truth is wholly subordinate to quickness of repartee. A native servant, appearing in appalling *deshabille*, was asked why she had not combed her hair. "Oh," she replied, "this is not the week for combing the hair; this is the week for washing the neck!" But the really essential element in a humorist is personality. Provided a saying bites, in some *argumentum*

ad hominem, it passes for the word of a humorist. East of Damascus one is hardly ever asked for baksheesh, so benighted are the desert tribes. But on the rare occasions when a child begs, it is enough if the traveller pulls a long face and turns the tables, crying, "I am a poor man, give me a bounty!" Then there is laughter at the expense, not of the second, but of the original, mendicant.[1] The camera is a perpetual source of remark, and on one occasion when a member of our party was about to take a photograph, a stranger exclaimed, "By the will of God he is getting out a spy-glass." "I have only one spy-glass," was the reply. "Where?" asked the other. "In my head, where you have one also." It may not strike the reader as an unusually subtle piece of pleasantry, but the entire company of bystanders laughed at it loud and long. Among the stories with which Fayyad regaled us at Karyatein was one of an ancient potentate who saw a litigant before him with a long and flowing beard. A sudden desire seized the potentate to have the man's beard shaved. The wily man, pretending compliance, asked modestly that before he gave his beard he might have the granting of three requests. The vizier, in high spirits, promised, and the man requested: first, that his law-suit be granted; second, that he might keep his beard;

[1] A lady, travelling from Kerak to the Dead Sea, was asked for baksheesh. She said, "From where, my brothers, should I have baksheesh, coming from Kerak?" The jest at the expense of a neighbouring town did its work, and they fell back grinning. (Forder, *Arabs in Tent and Town*, p. 20.)

third, that the vizier's beard be shaven. Such a reversal would seem to be the sort of thing that satisfies most fully the popular sense of humour. Sometimes the irony goes to extreme lengths, and a favourite tale, familiar in various forms to the children of many lands, which delights men who have heard it a hundred times before, is of one who went to sell some goods to a barber—(the barber is still the centre of Arabian Nights' Entertainments). The goods were brought upon a donkey's back, and the bargain was made that the barber should buy at his hand that which was upon his beast. But when it came to the delivery of the goods, the barber claimed also the donkey's harness, some of which was of silver mounting. This was violently disputed, but there was no help for it, and the harness changed hands. Then, when the money was paid over, the seller returned the price of two shavings, requesting that the barber should shave the seller and a friend of his. The barber agreed, in the hearing of the crowd, and then the man presented as his friend no other than the donkey, now bare of harness. A kadi was in the audience, and the humour of the situation was so irresistible that he enforced the bargain, and the beast was shaved from nose to tail, amid the laughter of the populace.

The delight in secret and tricky ways of doing things amounts to a passion, and life is frankly accepted and enjoyed as a game of skill and cunning. Within limits, the temptation of a disguise, or an

adventure, is irresistible, and to attain any object by a quite unnecessary lie is to add a zest to its attainment. Many of the best stories heard among tents and villages are of this sort, and these are sure to be appreciated. For instance, it is said that a certain Greek priest, being reprimanded by his superior for drinking too much arrak, and put upon an allowance of only 10 drachms per diem for the future, pled that he might be allowed to drink 10 drachms and one drop. The permission was given, and next day the priest was as drunk as ever. He had kept the command; but a *drop* may be interpreted in Arabic as the name of the letter which makes 10 into 100. Such playing upon words, and keeping to the letter while violating the spirit of an agreement, seems to be the form of humour dearest of all to the Arab heart. Another tale, also of a Greek priest, carries the matter even into higher regions. The priest had been accused, and was to be tried before five Mohammedan judges, for saying that Mohammed was in hell. It was an awkward situation, for to adhere to such an opinion was to be condemned by the Moslems, and to disclaim it was to lose his church. When the charge was announced to him, in the assembled court, he replied that that must refer to a dream he had had some time before. Asked to relate his dream, he told how he dreamed that he had died and gone to heaven, where he found himself among many prophets, among whom was Mohammed. By and by the Eternal Spirit entered, exclaimed that he had left his *tarbush*

(tasselled cap) in Gehenna, and asked which of his prophets would go to fetch it for him. Then it seemed that every prophet was busied with great affairs, so that neither Abraham, Noah, nor Job were at all able to fulfil the behest. But Mohammed volunteered, and, with words of commendation, sallied forth and grew smaller along the track of the heavens, till he vanished from sight at last in the yellow smoke of the pit. The priest stopped, and the judges, who had been fascinated by the story, cried "Yes, and what then?" "Ah," replied the wily one, "then I awoke!" A third story, characteristic of the narrow lines which separate faith from mockery in the East, is one that has been often told :—

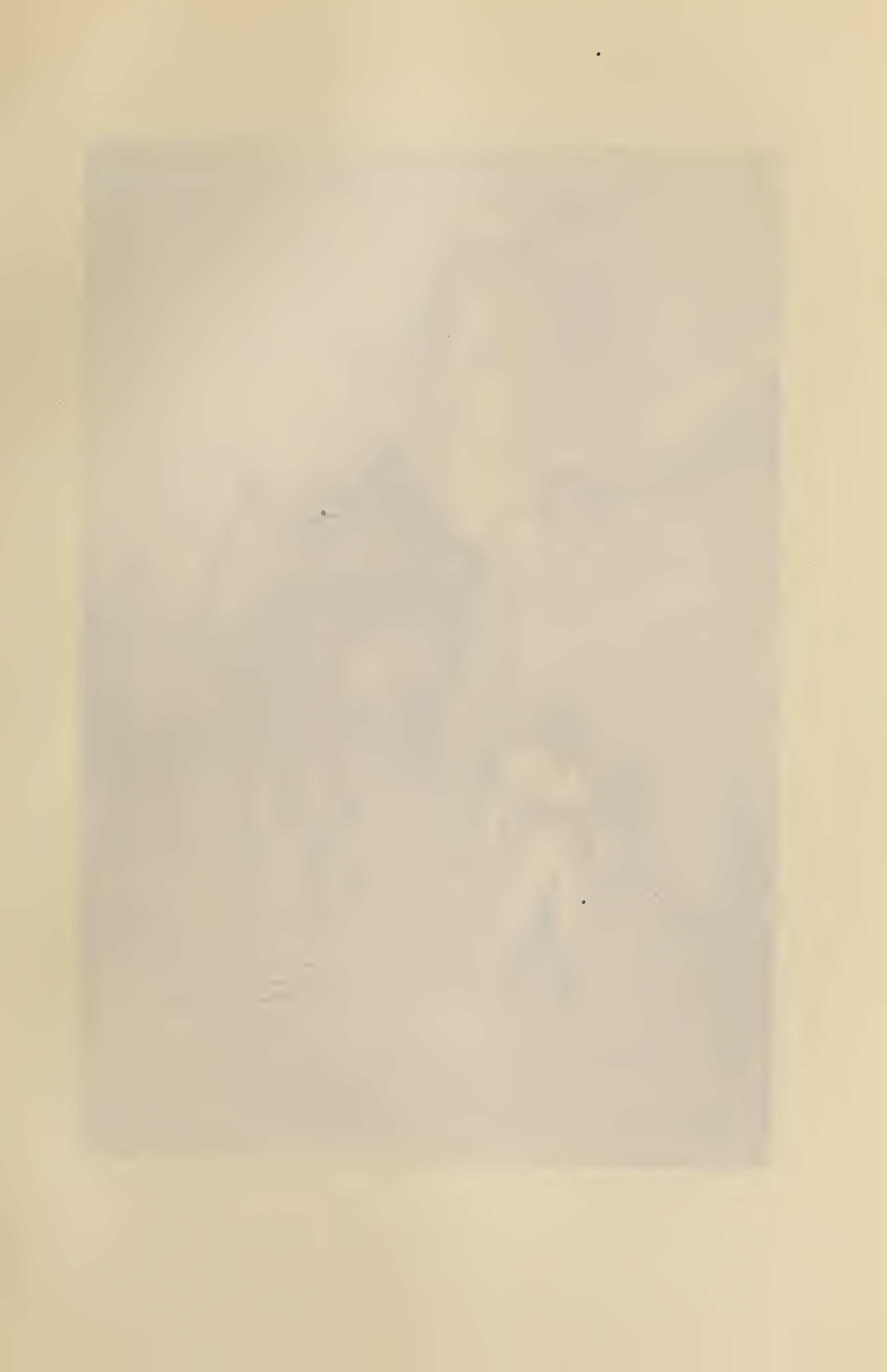
"The Arabs delight to tell the story of one, Sheikh Mohammed, who was then keeper of a wely of eminent sanctity, the tomb of a noted saint. Pilgrims thronged to it from every side, and Mohammed grew rich from their costly offerings. At length his servant, Ali, dissatisfied with his meagre share of the revenue, ran away to the East of the Jordan, taking his master's donkey. The donkey died on the road; and Ali, having covered his body with a heap of stones, sat down in despair. A passer-by asked him why he sat thus in lonely grief. He replied that he had found the tomb of an eminent saint. The man kissed the stones, and, giving Ali a present, passed on. Then news of the holy wely spread through the land. Pilgrims thronged to Ali, who soon grew rich, built a fine dome, and was the envy of all the sheikhs. Mohammed, hearing of the new wely, and finding his own shrine eclipsed by its growing popularity, made a pilgrimage to it, in hopes of ascertaining the source of its great repute. On

finding Ali in charge, he whispered to him, and asked the name of the saint whose tomb he had in charge. Ali said, "I will tell you, on condition that you tell me the name of your saint." Mohammed consenting, Ali whispered, "God alone is great; this is the tomb of the donkey I stole from you." "Mashallah!" said Mohammed, "and my wely is the tomb of that donkey's father." [1]

Intercourse with these children of the East is carried on in an alternation of silent intervals and outbursts of sudden volubility. When the outburst comes, it is as if a dam had broken, and in the multitude of rushing words all restraint seems to have been lost, and all memory of the thing that the speaker would have said. Yet much of this torrent is composed of sententious epigrams, any one of which, if it stood alone, were sufficient to oppress the hearer with the wisdom of Solomon, or of the friends of Job. In the East sententiousness is still taken for wisdom, and the epigram has a suggestion of truths too deep and weighty for plain utterance. Not once but many times the volubility of a speaker must be checked by the caveat, "I desire not twenty words, but one word." Or again, when in a village one is told that such and such are the ways of Damascus, the answer will be, "Damascus is Damascus, and this town is this town."

This wealth and fulness of speech is further increased by the fact that here and there there are still

[1] Wilson, *Picturesque Palestine*, vol. ii. 214.





CAMEL DRIVER





lingering a few villages where a dialect of the ancient Syriac (Aramaic) tongue is spoken. It is also enriched by a complex and most expressive system of gestures and sounds, which do duty for many emphatic words. The ritual of salutation, in which many parts of the body are touched lightly with the fingers, reminds one of the sign of the cross made upon their bodies by Roman Catholic worshippers. Such signs are unreproducible in written language, but they add a very piquant quality to conversation, and can express everything, from the most lordly air of superiority to the most impertinent contempt. By aid of these, and by reason of the strident loudness of the voices, a quite friendly discussion leads the uninitiated to expect instant bloodshed, until he is amazed to find the disputants relapse into a brotherly silence and the quiet smoking of tobacco.

But of all habits of Arab speech, that which has attained most refined perfection is the art of cursing. The commonest of oaths is the wish that "thy house be cursed"; but this is frequently elaborated by the enumeration of the whole list of your ancestors and contemporary relations. That, however, is nothing to the fiercer "*Yihrah dinak!*" by which "your religion" is brought under the ban. You will hear an old woman cursing the religion of her recalcitrant donkey, or a little child addressing the same language to a fly that persists in alighting on his face. Once, in a village of Lebanon, when we were eating our evening meal at the low table as we reclined on our carpets on the

floor, a very small kitten, after attempting a raid from several points, at last succeeded in a sudden spring upon a piece of meat. The serving-lad picked up the offending kitten, still holding the meat in firm jaws, and flung it from him with the cry, "A curse on thy harem." The kitten was certainly an unmarried person, and the incident will serve to show that relevancy is not so essential to an effective curse as forcibleness.

A curious question is raised by such tales, as to what can be the meaning to the men themselves of a religion which so freely lends itself to light uses, even among the pious. It is, indeed, a question which one is often tempted to ask nearer home, yet unquestionably there is a familiarity and even a broad laughter at sacred things which presents an interesting problem when it is cultivated by men who are fanatically devoted to their faith, and who would on a moment's notice fight and even die for it. To find a satisfactory answer, one would need to have lived among these people until a thorough knowledge had been gained of the subtleties of the working of the Oriental mind. It might be imagined that a religion which men treat so lightly is also lightly held. There are indeed tales of villages which have adopted a new religion in order to avoid a governor of bad repute; or which have put their religion on trial in time of drought, and when certain stipulated days of prayer had passed without answer, have exchanged it for another faith. But there can be no question whatever of the genuineness, and indeed vehemence, with which both Mohammed-



AT SALEHÎYEH





ans and Christians hold by their religion. No one who has heard the shout of conscripts in Damascus, to which we have already referred in a former chapter, will question that. A Moslem patient, who for weeks has received treatment in a Christian hospital, and has shown every sign of friendliness, will shout with all her strength as she goes down the corridor to depart, "*Din Mohammed, din Mohammed!*" ("The religion of Mohammed"). On the other hand, the more ancient Christian faith is no less obviously tenacious, and a convent may be seen fronting the walls of the farthest outpost village towards the desert, where convents have stood since the time of Constantine.

It is Moslem faith, however, which is chiefly concerned in this question, and it certainly is very curious to witness the levity which is compatible with fanaticism. The curses are obviously full of humour, and such tales as those already quoted are daring in convinced believers. Do these people take their faith seriously as a relation with superhuman realities and a record of actual facts? The answer seems to be that in the East the essential element in religion is not intellectual but ritual.[1] It is difficult for us Westerns to realise even as a possibility the conditions in which all questions of truth, doctrine, and fact are held in abeyance, and the whole attention of the faithful is concentrated on the performance of rites. Yet this is as entirely true of the Moslem Arab of to-day as it was of the tribes who of old in these

[1] Cf. p. 3.

same regions worshipped Baal. Consequently all manner of superstitions flourish and seem to thrive on laughter.[1] They are believed, yet the belief in them is of minor importance so long as the correct actions that relate to them are performed. When the Mohammedan shows you the tomb of Noah, large enough to bury a regiment in,[2] or the mark of the Prophet's foot upon a slab of rock, he has no objection to your laughter, and will even join in it. The important point about a prodigy is not its verisimilitude, far less any spiritual significance it may have, but its picturesqueness and exaggerated wonder. In the daylight, or at night when not alone, the Arab will jest about Sheitan (Satan), will tell you of his appearance, and boast that he is his friend. He will even venture a joke about the Afrites, or little devils of the sand, though he would not venture a solitary walk of a hundred yards for fear of them. Thus, in the absence of any habit of rational and intellectual dealing with such matters, belief swings freely between fear and laughter. The one fixed point of dogmatic certainty, which sobers life and quenches gaiety as no other part of faith can do, is the fatalism which enters into all departments of thought and experience. Should his mule die, the muleteer will weep

[1] "It is a curious psychological fact, that although the Syrians are generally extremely credulous, they delight in stories which make credulity ridiculous." (Wilson, *Picturesque Palestine*, p. 215.)

[2] The size of tombs, however, is regarded not so much as a measure of the stature of the dead, as of the honour paid to their memory. It is no unusual thing for modern tombs to measure 12, or even 18 feet in length. (Cf. Wilson's *Picturesque Palestine*.)

bitterly, and then proceed to skin the dead beast ; and as he goes away, leaving the companion of his journey to the dogs which have already gathered, he will end the incident by the simple word, "The mule was cursed." If you ask a villager in the morning what sort of weather it will be, he answers, "Allah." "But," you remonstrate, "you live here, what do you think will be to-day?" "Allah!" Once more you try, asking whether there is any chance of a favourable sky, only again to receive the same reply—"Allah!"

No doubt this overpowering fatalism has had its effect in moulding Eastern character, but it would seem that that character has also had some hand in producing it.[1] Power is congenial to the East, and every man is either a tyrant or a slave, or both. The monstrous tyrannies of the ancient empires, and the modern tyranny of the Turk, are better understood by the East than by the West. The alternative to this "policy of Orientalism," as Foster Kent has happily called the system, is responsible government. But that involves far too much exertion of mind on the part of the governed, and it is questionable whether any kind of democracy would not be regarded as a heavier burden than the acknowledged evils of oppression. Within certain limits, the village government is in the hands

[1] The remark of the priest in *The Garden of Allah* is very expressive—"It is not for me to question *le bon Dieu*, and *le bon Dieu* has created these people and set them here in the sand to behave as they do." That appears to be very much how they take themselves.

of the elders, but the limits are very narrow. From the small farmer who sits under his umbrella cursing steadily the women he has hired to weed his field, up to the powerful sheikh whose barefooted slaves watch for a sign from him in trembling silence as he eats, it is the same. The Turkish gradations of effendi, bey, pasha, sultan, are no strange thing to any Arab. Force is understood and respected, where entreaties and appeals to humanity and pity are but wasted breath, and compliance is at once interpreted as a sign of weakness. A small incident may be quoted in illustration. The writer's horse had a feud with the horse of one of the muleteers, and for some days the man always shouted imperiously to keep off when unwarily the beasts drew too near. At last this grew irksome, and the muleteer was told to take *his* beast out of the way. The new view of things was indeed second best, but it was almost as congenial, and from that hour there was no further trouble. One of Fayyad's best stories in the tent at Karyatein was of Harun al Raschid, who upon a day as he travelled, entered a fellah's house. He saw there, as he sat absent-minded and thinking on affairs of state, the passing beautiful daughter of the fellah. Falling violently in love with the girl, he told her father that he was wealthy and asked for her to be his wife. He was curtly denied, and begged again and again for that great gift, offering wider and wider prospects of grandeur for the peasant girl, but plea after plea was only the more insolently refused. When he had returned to his tent, his



HOUSE OF ANANIAS, DAMASCUS





servant saw him looking sad, unable to sleep and refusing to eat. Asking what ailed him, he drew forth the tale of the fellah and his refusal, and the wail that he would die if he might not have the girl. The servant went in turn to the fellah's house, and in the evening returned, bringing with him the coveted damsel shining in fair attire like the young moon for beauty. The heart of Harun was full of healing and delight, and all his life came back to him. And one day, when the greatness of his joy had left him leisure, he returned to the fellah and asked him why he had given to his servant what he had refused to himself. "Ah," said the fellah, "you did not ask her rightly." "And how did my servant ask?" "He entreated me roughly, and taking me by the throat began to beat me, and when he was just about to slay me, he demanded my daughter, whereupon I cried to him to take the girl and all that was hers, and that immediately." "*Ah*," added the sheikh, when his laughter over his own tale had left him breath, "*that's the way to do with Mohammedans*."

The curse of Turkish administration is proverbial, and the insolence of their meanest officials towards the fellahin makes the gorge of British travellers often rise. The soldier whom you take with you as guide, turns his horse to graze unchallenged in the finest growing crops near every halting-ground. Slovenly and often ragged, the soldiers delight in roughness, and rudely push about the men they meet, saying, "Come along, my lambs!" It would be difficult to dispute

the common assertion that the Turkish administration blights and curses everything that it touches, and that "wherever the hoof of a Turkish horse rests, it leaves barrenness behind it. Yet to the east of Damascus, the fierce Turk is regarded as a protector by the people. A curse used sometimes by an exceedingly angry man is, "May Allah multiply your sheikhs!" It would seem that in these villages that curse has found fulfilment. First of all, and most formidable, there are the robber Bedouin to reckon with. For protection from them there is a Turkish garrison quartered on the country here and there; and in every larger village a Turkish mudir (or governor). Then there is the local sheikh (or sheikhs, for there are sometimes several of them), whose power is still very great over individuals of the tribe. Thus, at such a place as Furklus, you may see, as we did, a mingled company of superbly-mounted Arabs, arrayed in the ancient style with tufted spears, and officers of cavalry in the army of the Sublime Porte.

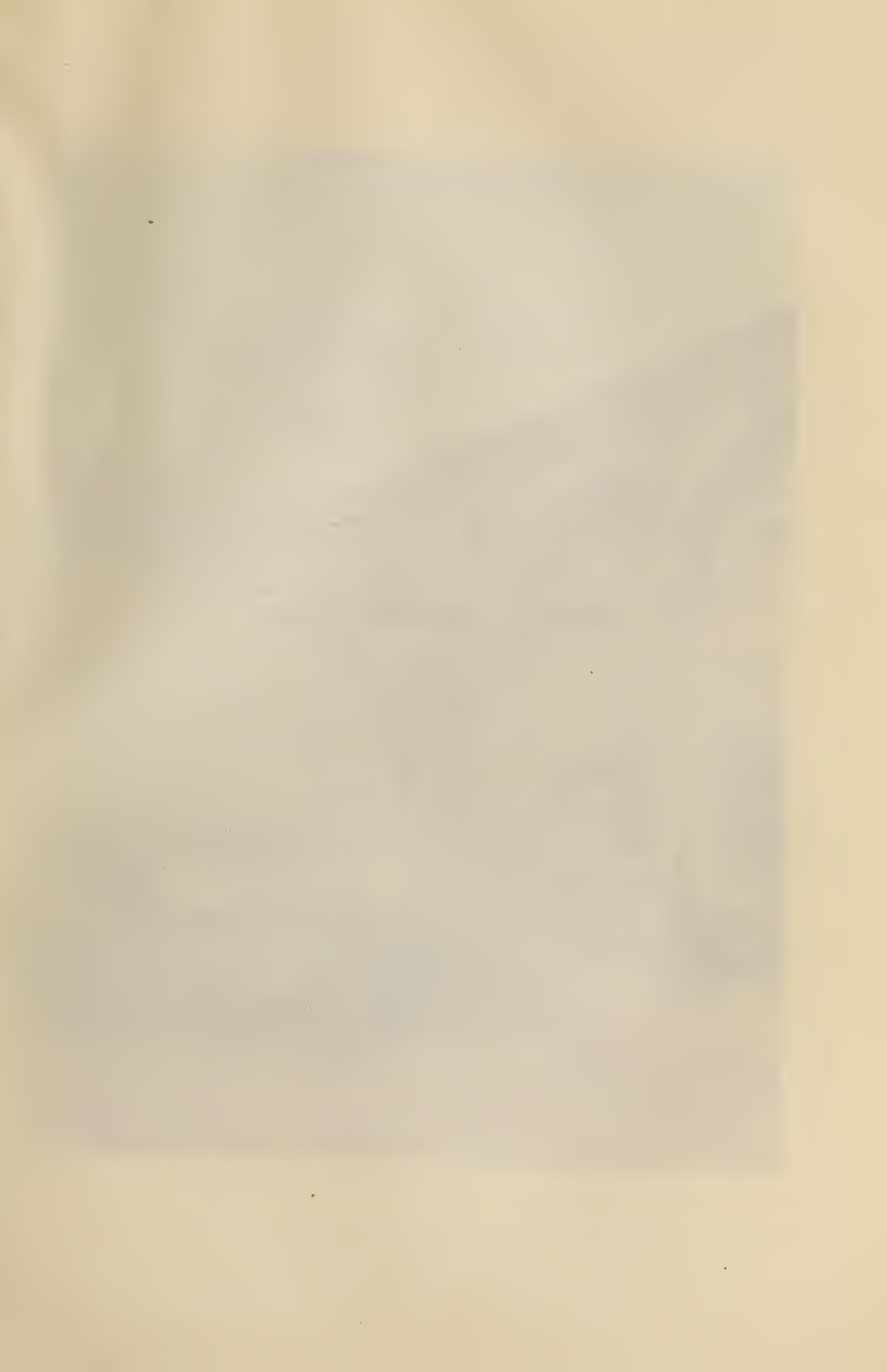
It would seem that the farther east you go, the more power you find in the sheikhs of the older *régime*, and the less in the hands of the mudir. In one village the latter official came swaggering to our tents, dressed like a shabby-genteel cockney with the exception of the tasselled fez cap. He demanded our credentials, and began to put us through an elaborate catechism as to whether we were Catholic or Protestant, and much else. But when the sheikh arrived, and was manifestly friendly, the little man subsided into an apologetic

subservience which left his catechism abruptly broken off. Afterwards we called at his house by night, and he himself, shutting close the door of his harem, opened for us and received us with coffee and cigarettes. The room was bare and his garments were ancient and full of holes. But the tobacco was the choicest of Aleppo, and his courtesy knew no bounds. Seated on the floor he wrote upon his hand a letter, with a split reed for pen, and blotted it with sand which afterwards rattled in the envelope. But the letter smoothed our way with subsequent mudirs.

The relations between the Arabs and the Frangi—their name for Europeans—were in all our experience of the pleasantest. It is less than fifty years since the great massacre of Christians in Syria, which led to the establishment of the present Lebanon administration. These days are not yet forgotten, and some date their birth as so many years before, or after, the massacre.[1] In Ma'alula we saw the holes by which the entire population burrowed in the rocks behind their village, dwelling in subterranean caves and dens till the terror was over, and many a man we met had been an orphan since 1860. But the bitterness of such memories appears to be past now. At least as to ourselves, the passing strangers, nothing could have been kindlier than our intercourse with these people. Full of curiosity, they crowded round the tents at every halt, a company of many colours. They would discuss our boots, and wonder what was paid for

[1] Cf. p. 12.

such. The cameras were an endless source of wonder to them, and at the sight of the revolvers they were consumed with envy. European machinery is a dream of miracle to them, and a dragoman told us of a journey on which he had had to conduct an American in a palanquin. The villagers of the Hauran eagerly examined it, asking, "Is it the carpet of the wind? Is it a steamer? Is it a sailing-boat?" They look upon the Frangi from various points of view. One old man, who perhaps may have encountered Mark Twain's "Mr. Grimes," complained that the Frangi never see an Arab without wanting to draw their revolvers. On the whole, the Frangi are respected for their superior cunning, to which all their inventions are ascribed. A tale is even popular of a Frangi who met the devil and outwitted him. Proposing that instead of both walking, one might carry the other while the rider sang a song, the Frangi bore the devil till his song was ended. Then, mounting, he began an endless lilt—"Tarra dum, tarra dum, tarra dum, dum, dum"—and when Sheitan inquired whether the song were not nearly ended, answered, "Oh no, it's only just begun!"—an admirable Frangi from the Arab point of view. For our part, it is a pleasure to repeat that we found among them nothing but welcome and gentleness. They offered shelter from the storm, and countless times pressingly invited us to share the hospitality of their houses. They brought water from their wells and milk from their flocks, and would have shared with us any of the few luxuries they had in



MOSQUE ES SINAMIYEH, DAMASCUS





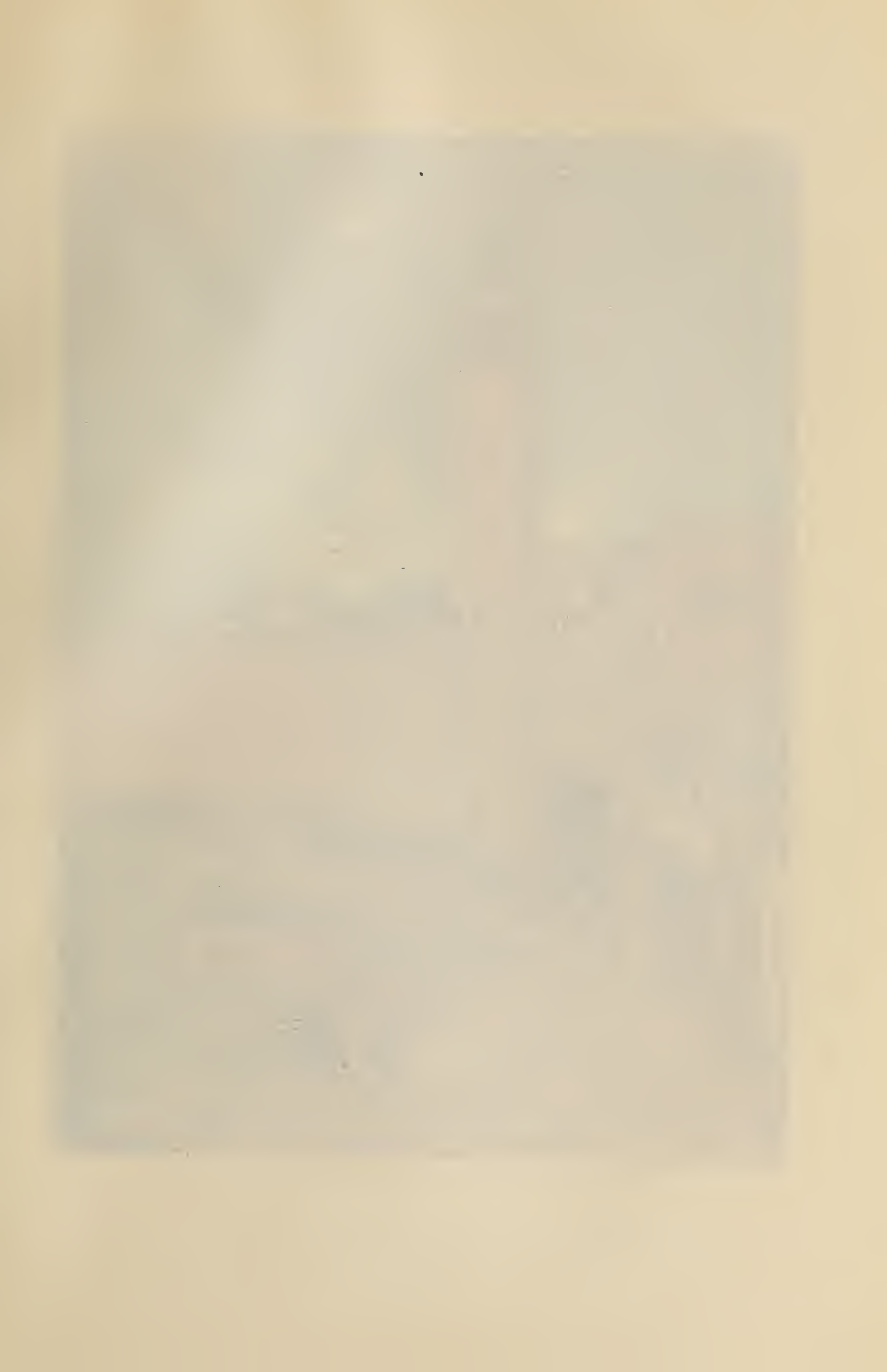
store. Among them, from first to last, we were friends and not aliens. We knew well that much of that kindness was due to gratitude towards the Ḥakim from Damascus. Yet even when they had not before known him they were full of gentleness.

CHAPTER VII

THE DESERT

THE morning when one starts for the desert is not likely to be forgotten. Wakened early amid the comforts of civilisation in Damascus by the sound of ringing bells of the horses and mules that were to carry us and our necessities along the track we had gazed at from the minaret, we felt that excitement strong upon us which has quickened the pulses of men in the East ever since and long before history began. If it be only another valley or a new town that is over the horizon's edge, it calls to something that is within us all to go and explore it. But when it is the Desert of Syria, with Bagdad and Babylon, Nineveh and Aleppo for outposts, the adventure appeals to all that a man has of imagination and desire.

In Egypt, that green land of streams and water-wheels, whose rich river-soil is crowded with men and women, oxen and laden asses, forming a bright foreground to every picture, the transition from fertile land to desert is abrupt. The dividing line, as seen from the top of the Great Pyramid, or crossed in the railway train at Tel-el-Kebir, might have been drawn



BAB SHERKI, DAMASCUS





with a ruler, so sharp is the edge between green and yellow. The only approach to compromise or blend between the two is furnished by the weary-looking palm-trees, unwashed and unrefreshed by rain, and eternally grey with the flying dust which has been blown from the sand-heaps across the boundary. In the frontiers of the Syrian Desert all is different. For three days, riding north-east from Damascus, you are seldom out of sight of villages, nestling in grassy hollows of the barren Kalamun mountains, or dotting wide plains in the larger open spaces. Each of these lonely hamlets lies around the minaret of its mosque upon a faintly-coloured carpet of green, marking the ring of cultivation round its walls, and limited by the resources of its springs. Between village and village there is always the same gradation—leafy gardens, then well-drawn furrows with standing crops, then furrows more faintly drawn, until imperceptibly the unploughed land begins, and it is desert until you realise that you are among furrows once more. At first the circles of ploughed land almost touch one another, but the barren interspaces increase in breadth, until for several hours at a stretch you are making for the next village across a vacant wilderness. On the third day out, among the last outposts of "city" life, there are but two or three villages from Der Atijeh to Karyatein. Already great ovals of mere sun-scorched plain surround and seem to enclose the travellers, and the objective becomes a knot of truncated cones in the distance, which under Western skies would be a couple of miles

away, but here will take at least three hours of steady riding. Hameira, one of the loneliest of villages, presents a comfortless aspect to the road, of high ochre-coloured walls, unbroken by windows, and pierced only by loopholes for guns. Karyatein rises like a modelled piece of the plain it stands in, the colours of houses and land alike being that brownish ochre which turns so easily to rose in sunset, or to indigo or violet in the shadow of an evening cloud. It is the last outpost, standing sentinel on the edge of a desert which for twenty hours of riding shows no house of human habitation. Such villages have struck some travellers as dreary, but even on the outward journey the fact that they are homes of men induces rather a mood of gratitude than of criticism. To those returning from the desert they assume all the aspect of "ports and happy havens." Even to us, coming westward to the lands about Furklus on the way to Homs, the exhilaration was wonderful when the change in the colour of green told us that we had left the faded and uncomforting bushes of the desert for the richer fields of vines and growing wheat. To wanderers who have long been absent from it, this verdure must be exciting almost to madness. If, as Robertson Smith has shown, Palestine appealed to its inhabitants always in unconscious contrast with the desert, then it was indeed a veritable Garden of the Lord, a land flowing with milk and honey, a place of sacred trees and water springs which the Lord had blessed.[1]

[1] Cf. p. 1.

The Desert

There are not many experiences more surprising and revolutionary than the change which comes into one's conception of what "the desert" means when one has crossed it in Syria. It is not an endless expanse of yellow sand. Here and there such a patch may be seen in it, but the masses of reddish yellow that lie behind Beyrout, and throw up the dark pines on the Sidon road into strong relief, show a larger surface of sand than can be found between them and Palmyra. It is often spoken of as monotonous and dreary, but that could be the verdict only of one whose eyes had never learned to see what they looked upon. It is probable that no part of the world can show so constant, so subtle, and so complete a variety as the desert shows. Featureless stretches are indeed encountered here and there, but these only serve as neutral interludes to bring into stronger intensity the kaleidoscopic effects of the rest.

Judged even by the rough standard of shape and elevation, this is true. The land is in this region steppe-desert, falling in huge slices of descending level to the expanses of the eastern plain. The desert has mountain ranges in it, barren as the very ribs of death, and coloured in every dead and stony shade of colour. These mountain ranges hold up, at a level of 1800 or 1900 feet above the sea, vast flats of wedge-shaped or oval tableland, held aloft to the sun and waterless; and little gorges and ravines hacked and split out of livid rock. By the route through Kuteifeh and Der Atijeh to Karyatein, one climbs by such ravines to the suc-

cessive plains, and then journeys along each of them to its edge whence the next vast amphitheatre discloses itself in a steppe two or three hundred feet below the last. For a time you travel along the length of the ovals, but above Karyatein you cross the edge to descend at right angles upon the blunt end of a wedge-shaped spike of desert. It would take ten hours to cross that broad base of the wedge on horseback, from Karyatein to Furklus ; but it sharpens into an acute angle at the watch-towers guarding the pass above Palmyra, and the plain in whose mountain edge Palmyra nestles shows no further boundary at all, the range opening to right and left with the appearance of a gigantic parabola. These edges over which one plain drops suddenly to another at lower level, present the most startling and dramatic effects. When the journey has begun to seem long, and the rein slacks and the brain grows sleepy, you reach a tumble of broken sand-hills, or perhaps a slab of rock, and suddenly a new world spreads itself out for fifty miles before and below your feet, and you are once more startled into a fresh realisation of the illimitable breadth of the desert.

Even within the same plain you seem to be slowly wheeling forward from one vast circle to another, the centre and the circumference insensibly changing as you go. You have not apparently touched the rim, but remain always at the centre. Yet the circle is constantly changing—always indeed faint and almost spectral in its colouring, yet never for long the same,—now green and silver, then grey and rusty, yet again



DRUZE VILLAGE IN THE LEBANON





blood-coloured, with splashes of delicate purple and gold. It is as if the bordering hills were in constant recession, slowly retreating before the forward-wheeling sweep of those strange circles. When at last you actually reach the edge at any part of this mountain-desert, it is but another of those subtly graduated changes. For here the plain seems not to cease, but only to have tilted itself into a mountain-side, as if it had begun to feel the monotony of its level and become mountain simply for the sake of doing something. The green and white, or the grey and rusty colours are simply spread at a different angle before the eye.

On the smaller scale of the immediately surrounding tract there is as little monotony as on the larger. At first, and especially as it is viewed from one of the lofty edges which have been referred to, the steppe appears to be on a dead level of flat surface. Yet on such a surface you may rise or fall several hundred feet on a day's ride. Here again the change is of the subtlest. Even as you travel you might mistake the surface for an unbroken level. But if you lag behind for a few minutes, you may look up in amazement to find yourself utterly alone, the centre of an illimitable waste, and your companions absolutely blotted out of existence, far as the eye can reach. For the "ribbed desert" lies in many places in long hollows and waves of land, like the troughs and crests of a rolling ground-swell at sea, but longer and broader. These imperceptible undulations account for that unexpected and appalling

solitude which strikes the novice with such surprise. Here and there, too, there are more obvious breaks in the level, bluffs and sand-dunes like those of a familiar seashore. So familiar do these seem that you feel the sea *must* be just beyond them, and can hardly persuade yourself that if you climbed them it would be but to see farther stretches of the landscape which already fills your eyes.

Writers have described the effect on their inhabitants of the great plains of Hungary and the American prairie.[1] In such writings we can trace clearly enough the transference of mood either from Nature to man or from man to Nature. Certain it is that the desert always seems to change its mood as one moves across it. Without water, and bare of trees and grass, it is sensitive to every detail of atmospheric conditions, responding immediately to every change of light. Like the sea, it is now hard as the face of an old wicked man, now tender as a virgin saint; now bewitching and immediately disenchanting. The Arabs have many names for it, whose variety shows how they have felt its inconstancy of mood. On the spirit of the traveller, passing on through its little hidden gardens, over its leprous spots of flaking scurf, and its neutral unsympathetic places, it plays as on an instrument of many strings, until he wonders to find how many men a man can be in so short a time.

These effects are, of course, immensely heightened

[1] Professor Ramsay, *The Education of Jesus*, Introd.; cf. also the Hungarian novelist, Eötoös, in *The Village Notary*.

by the vegetation of the desert. There are indeed spots of absolute barrenness—wind-swept stretches of sand, bare outcrop of rock, or wildernesses of strewn stones almost like the shingle of a river-beach. Here and there you may ride for hours on end without finding a single stone. Circles of broken ground, where waterspouts have burst or perhaps where a whirlwind has torn up the earth, appear at rare intervals. But there is almost everywhere a carpet of some sort of lowly vegetation flung upon its hard floor. The flowers and plants are for the most part found in patches, and even of green itself there is an infinite variety of shades. Now it is a mossy yellowish tint, as if the ground were covered with lichens ; then a dark blue, or a sage green shading into olive. Sometimes a little natural garden comes like an unexpected smile, where, hidden in a watercourse not yet quite dry, daisies and poppies shine from among the green leaves of a plant like clover. Again, a bed of dwarf irises, no bigger than crocus-flowers, gives a sheen of faint purple on tawny ground, like a dove's breast against a leopard's skin. Wild-flowers remind one of the wild geranium, the buttercup, wild mustard, and thyme. Saffron beds of "pheasant's eyes" look out from spots of green pasture near the mountain oases, and little blue speedwells with a sprinkling of dark purple dwarf poppies. Over some of the broken and rolling ground, before you come to the green and silver of the Tafcha plateau, is flung a covering of purple and white that recalls a Persian carpet. Now and then the guide will fall

upon a bulbous plant like garlic, and eat it greedily as he goes on his way. Long stretches where the earth is a loam of whitish pink, are marked with little explosions of the caked surface, through which spikes like long fir cones push upwards, black or claret-coloured when closed, but bursting afterwards into a mass of yellow flower which might almost be mistaken for a pine-apple. These are said to be a kind of truffle, sold as food in Damascus, and the slave-Arabs keep trained dogs to root them out in the same ways as pigs do in France.

There is a curious suggestion of mimicry about the desert flowers, as if they were trying to be garden flowers, but attaining only to a pathetic miniature imitation of them, with colours washed out and pale. There are little blue flowers like Canterbury bells, and others like half-opened crocuses and tiger lilies. There are thin-stemmed little feathers of brown and yellow, like very straggling stock-blossoms; lavender-coloured marguerites, whose light petals surround a dark purple heart; Christmas-roses (so one might easily imagine), dandelions, and marguerites with their yellow and white petals cropped short in a circle half its proper size. Botanists doubtless would classify them all, and pronounce many of these resemblances fanciful and unscientific. Yet that is how they appear to the eye whose only botanical training is the remembrance of well-loved gardens. It is a pleasant fancy, and an elusive one, for there is a singular unhomeliness even in the sweetest of the desert flowers. Many

of them are hard, like everlastings, with the appearance of succulence masking the reality of "a root out of a dry ground." In some patches it would almost seem as if in sheer cruelty Nature had set herself to create a dry and withered caricature of marsh-plants full of rich juices. And there is about these small solitary blossoms a curious sense of quaintness and independence as of "odd creatures that God has set up for themselves." Here and there a waft of sweet perfume refreshes the senses at unawares, or the heavy scent of opium betrays a bed of poppies blazing in some hidden place near at hand. But for the most part the hot air draws out strongly aromatic odours whose pungent spiciness is the authentic smell of the East.

These are occasional variations, but there are three plants at least which are so universally distributed as to form the staple vegetation in all this region. There is that small brownish-grey bush known as the camel-thorn—not the *spina Christi*, whose blanched branches, with their inch-long spikes of thorn, shine white here and there upon the ground, but a bushy sphere of fine branchlets with infinite hair-like thorns. Over many miles there is the hermil-plant, a very finished imitation, some two feet high, of the araucaria tree, but bright orange where the stems leave the ground, and bearing a small black flower. Above all there is the kali plant, mother of alkali and best friend of the tent-dweller. It sends up from the earth a bunch of single green rods, and when these wither the heart of

the bunch shines green from its grey border, half dead and half alive. Round Palmyra there are great fields of kali, and the ground is dotted with little round depressions, hollow pans of clay, where the Arabs have been burning it. The stems are kept for seven days and then burned, and the ashes will fetch as much as eight shillings per pound in Damascus. The powder, of course, is taxed; but even the Turk has refrained from taxing the plant itself, which the Arab gathers from the ground without payment. A fine brown powder is prepared from kali stems not burned, but dried and pounded. The Arab women put a handful of it in the blue bag which contains also their soiled garments, soak the whole in an oasis stream or pool, and wash it by vigorously beating it upon stones.

In the main the general aspect of the desert is some shade of green. There are those wonderful green and silver days, in limestone country, where the outcrop of rock, touched here and there by shafts of sunlight piercing a grey sky, shines brilliantly from fawn-coloured dunes sprinkled with bushes or with bents. In other places the bushes grow where countless round black stones are lying, or where black and red cinder-like stones remind one of the slag of ironworks. The general hue is dim sage-green where the ground is sandy, with occasional splashes of orange sand breaking its hazy expanse. The bushes are not massed, but each grows solitary, allowing the colour of the ground itself to blend with that of its vegeta-



ARAB ENCAMPMENT BETWEEN HOMS AND PALMYRA





tion, shining, as it were, through a thick translucent veil. And as the ground changes in colour from black through crimson to pink and yellow, the general aspect is varied and complex in the extreme. But one thing dominates the colour scheme, and gives it often a royal splendour. In the desert every shadow turns to purple. The variety of shades, from lightest mauve and lilac through brilliant violet to a purple that is almost black, is the most striking feature of every landscape. On the large scale it is seen in the shadows of clouds that trail across the plains, indigo and neutral black, with a purple sheen in them. On the small scale it may be seen where at sunset the hermil-plant, standing with its lustrous dark-green foliage, as if it were of enamelled iron, in the sunset, casts its long shadow over the earth, painting its silhouette on the rosy clay in the most intense of violet hues.

Any attempt, such as this, to describe the appearance of the desert only serves to convince one how indescribable it is. Its endless variety of physical features, the effects of rainfall or of drought, and the changing seasons of the year, turn its kaleidoscope continually. Yet one thing every traveller feels, and feels more intensely if he chances to pass from it straight to France, where the rush of spring is kindling great masses of the green land with the fury of a thousand brilliant colours, and that is its lifelessness. In the forests of Fontainebleau, where there are the same colours as the desert showed, seen now along vistas of rain-drenched woods, everything is passionate

with vitality, and the sudden glory of its life interprets the mystery of the desert, which was always seeking but never finding its explanation as you rode across it. The desert colouring is stony or metallic. Life is there, but it has compromised with death.

Sunrise and nightfall are the supreme hours. At high noon the sun tyrannises over the plains, smiting their colours flat and silencing the world and the heart of the traveller. But he who has seen the sun rise there knows once and for ever the meaning of the lines :—

> Behold your bridegroom cometh in to you
> Exceeding glad and strong.[1]

One such sunrise we saw on the last day of our outward journey. Rising in the darkness for an early start, we were first aware of the black outline of the guard-house by the well, chipping its square out of the field of stars beside us, and of the pale lanterns moving near the fire whose crimson embers lit the passing forms of dark-robed men. The moon had risen like a bloody sword, then changed to a crescent, and hung there undergoing minute by minute its transformation from gold to silver. Before we had started, a pearly gleam was already shining from the white ashes of last night's charcoal fires, and where lights had been twinkling in the distance, the black tents of Bedouin began to show upon the earth. We rode forward into an orange glow, where sunrise was promised—not so much a splendour as an infinitude of

[1] Francis Thomson, *Spring*.

quiet light, while still the breeze blew cool upon our faces. Then followed a very wonderful thing. The horizon swept steadily outwards from us into a wider and wider brown circle, which covered itself with a silver haze as the earth-mist rose. Beyond the edge of it, mountains rose higher and higher as the circle of lit plain broadened. The one object visible at our feet was an Arab's grave, that had caught the light upon its humble stones. Behind us the lights still twinkled in the Arab tents (for by this time we had passed them), against a cold background of pure dark blue. At last, in front, the sun rose very quietly. Clear and black shot the long shadows of men and horses, flung in prodigious and fantastic lines along the path behind, but soon to shorten until they would be at noonday mere splashes of dark at our feet. But when the feet of the foremost horses had raised the sand, they seemed to kindle flames from the earth, "the golden sand" of desert mornings. Instinctively, upon that lighting of fires on the altars of the sun, we bared our heads. It is no wonder that in the East men worshipped the sun. It is no wonder that Turner cried with his last breath: "The sun, he is God." It is said that a lady once asked a Persian ambassador in London whether they really worshipped the sun in his country, and was answered, "Madame, you would worship him too if you had seen him!"

No less wonderful is the coming on of night.[1]

[1] Benson, in *The Image in the Sand*, p. 3, gives a very beautiful description of the desert in its more gorgeous evening moods.

City-bred Arabs are afraid of it, and huddle close together in their tents, waiting fearfully and helplessly for morning. But the Bedouin travel often by night, guiding their course by the stars ; and a certain star "at the left ear" shows them the direction of the Kaaba at Mecca for their prayers. He who has watched for an hour in Egypt after nightfall, and traced the swift course of a selected star as it moved across the point of a pyramid, while the silent group of camel-drivers, hushed by the darkness, sit like images on the sand, must have felt the bewitching mystery of the Eastern heavens.

More impressive still is nightfall in the desert. Our loneliest camping ground was the first on the way westward from Palmyra. There was no well, and we had hired camels bearing supplies of water. Near sunset we found ourselves on a flat plain, not far from the edge of the western wall of mountains, which here had sunk to the appearance of a broken line of bluffs along a seashore, dark slate with long yellow slopes for foot-hills. As these were growing misty, and about their bases gathered a lower band of bluish grey, the tents were pitched on the open plain. The camels knelt and their precious burden was poured out for the thirsty horses, mules, and donkeys. The camels, seeking no water, were set free, and with them the donkeys, wandering far out on the plain. After the bustle of the camp had subsided we sat in the tent door. Round us the Syrians were smoking silently or talking in whispers. The Arab soldier-guides had

spread their mats beside the horses and lain down in them to sleep under the open sky. The sun set in a fading pearly light, and the horizon drew inwards to a smaller and smaller circle of visible ground. Ever as it shrank towards the centre, the wandering beasts came with it home to the tents. The mountains, which by prejudice of the eye[1] seemed to sink gradually down through the growing darkness, appeared hardly to break the even rim of skyline which divided the stars from the blank darkness of earth. The caress of the warm and dry wind, laden with aromatic scent, clean and untainted ; the pearly sky that might have given to the Apostle his image for the gates of the Heavenly City ; the silence and the loneliness of the dark,—these all contribute to the spell which the desert casts.

The roads that cross the desert are great factors in history, which have had much to do with the destinies of mankind and the rise and fall of empires. As one remembers the ancient journeying of nations seeking a new home, of military expeditions and of laden caravans, one realises how great a thing the road is, and wonders whether it be not a kind of sacrilege for modern men to use it ! And the stretch of these roads is so immense. When you cross the Aleppo road, for instance, your imagination rests but for a moment on that terminus, two hundred miles to the

[1] This instance of optical illusion in the vision of landscape will explain the fact, so puzzling to beginners, that the camera shows distant mountains not as the eye sees them but as a mere line along the horizon.

north, and you recollect that Aleppo is but a short stage on the great route to Nineveh on the farthest side of Mesopotamia. Nay, the road you are following to Palmyra runs on to the Euphrates, on to Persia, and across the Afghan mountains to India itself; or, bending southwards, leads to Bagdad and the Persian Gulf. And you can well believe this, for the immediate objectives of your march seem to be continually receding. Out of the spectral lilac of the farthest distance you suddenly see the landfall of a ruined khan or the guard-house beside a well, and your heart beats faster for the sight. The plain no longer holds you in its featureless prison, for that companionable thing is there—minute, but clear-edged, beckoning you to come. You know that at best it will be the loneliest little house that man has built, and yet it is the one thing that holds eye and mind for many a mile. As you move onwards, for hours it grows no larger, until it seems as if it were receding before your advance into the infinite distance. But at last it appears to halt, and every minute to expand, until under its walls at last you count another stage of the journey finished.

The actual road is strangely unlike that "highway across the desert" which Western roads have accustomed one to expect. Here and there, as it runs straight and unswerving beside the edge of broken ground, it may seem to justify the name. But along the greatest length of its course it is but a network of narrow footpaths, each some eighteen inches in breadth,





1. THE WELL OF ASRA.

2. GUARD HOUSE AT AIN EL BEDA.



whose constant curves run into a sort of irregular braided pattern. Yet it is *the road*, and has led the feet of hundreds of generations across the world. Now and then a stampede of mules with their unwieldy burdens dancing upon them to apparent destruction, or an accident to an unwary rider, may introduce a momentary element of absurdity ; but such levity is of short duration, and the road points its solemn direction unheeding of the incident. Your native guide knows that, and clings to the track with a pathetic faithfulness. Off it, he at once loses his head, and runs about in all directions in helpless excitement. He even dislikes any wandering on the part of his charges, and views with pain and apprehension the slightest deviation. It is no use to seek to comfort him or to persuade him. "The road is better," is his answer to all argument.

Those solitary houses, seen for so many miles before you reach them, which point the way to the wells in this district, are guard-houses or khans of the rudest sort, built at the expense of the Government to shelter travellers. Roughly constructed of rubble, plastered over with yellowish-brown mud, they present a square of four walls some twenty feet high, and perhaps sixty feet in length and breadth. There are no windows in those walls, but a lofty gateway, half the height of them, in the middle of the side that fronts the road, and a buttress here and there where the masonry is precarious. Round an open court in the centre runs a continuous suite of flat-roofed rooms, in which horses

and men may find shelter. Outside steps from the court lead to the roof, which is balustraded, the balustrade being pierced with small holes for the escape of rain-water. Above the door a square chamber is built upon the roof, giving the appearance of a truncated tower, and furnished with windows in which rough wooden louvres take the place of glass. These strange habitations are occupied by one or two Arabs—perhaps an old man and a boy,—and the life which they lead alternates between the shrill noise and bustle of thirsty men and beasts at the well, and utter blank and silence. After all the excitement which they have awakened, the impression made by these desert outposts when they are reached is that of the extremest loneliness.

Of course, that which gives its significance to such a rest-house is the well which it guards. When there is surface water, vegetation springs up, and the bright green of trees or grass shines from far across the waste. Long tracks of ibexes lead to them from distant hills, and when you approach them you may be startled by the whirr of swift-flying sand-grouse that have come thither to drink. But frequently the well is deep, and nothing betrays its presence but the round hole in the stony soil, while the walls of the rest-house rise hard and unrelieved by the shade of a tree or the sweetness of a garden. In some places the well-mouth is protected by a strongly-built and domed enclosure, but generally it is not even marked by a parapet, the stones of its edge at the ground-level being cut into

deep grooves by the ropes of generations of water-drawers. These wells are ancient, and the names of those who first dug them are lost in the far past; but some of them have been recently reopened. The sheikh of Palmyra told us that a year ago he had organised a band of workmen and cleared one such well, and had built the guard-house also, the whole undertaking costing only some £125 (Turkish). That well was deep, but not so deep as the next one, five hours to the west of it. For that we brought with us from Karyatein a rope to draw with, and 220 feet of the rope had to be paid out before the skin at the end of it touched water. When the skin is filled, the free end of the rope is attached to a mule, or shouldered by a couple of muleteers, who run out along a well-worn track until the wet skin appears splashing at the little wheel at the surface.

Every one has heard of the tragedies of thirst in desert places, but the significance of water needs to be seen and felt before it can be realised. When the way is long between the wells, the horses, when the halting-place comes at last in sight, press forward with pricked-up ears, and, forgetting their weariness, are with difficulty kept from a gallop. Camels will go waterless for days, and it is strange to see them contentedly move out to graze when relieved of the tins of water they have carried, for which all the other beasts are crying out. The mules suffer most, and on one occasion we lost one after two days upon short allowance. The poor beast had shown no sign of flagging, and indeed had carried his

burden friskily, but when his day's work was over and he had reached the camp, he lay down immediately on his back and died. Every one in the camp felt a kind of awe, beyond the keen sense of pity for the faithful brute. The significance of water in the desert is so immediate and so fateful, and the difference between a mouthful and the want of it is the difference between life and death. But the tragedy is far more appalling when the sufferer is a fellow-man. An unnoticed crack in a water-skin, or the jar spilt by a stumbling beast, is all that is needed to bring some poor mortal to his end. We passed one band of pilgrims returning, many of them on foot, from Mecca, and one of them, an old man, reached the Well of Ain el Beda with his tongue hanging from his mouth, cracked and bleeding. While we were resting by another well, a man staggered in from the plain, hardly able to walk, crying "Water, water; I am dead!" When, on the return journey, we again visited Ain el Beda, a crowd of the Mecca pilgrims had camped beside the well in a confusion of tents new and old, among which camels knelt in supercilious nonchalance. But at the well-mouth tied skins were lying, filled to their utmost capacity with the precious thing, and tangled skeins of rope were everywhere about, while a dense crowd of swarthy men cursed and fought like wild beasts for the next skinful, though by that time they were drawing little else than liquid mud. It would be difficult to find in any one sentence so terrible a combination of tragedy and pathos as in the words we have all heard



SELLER OF WATER





so often without a thought, "When the poor and needy seek water and there is none."

Though the desert is so empty of permanent human habitations, it is by no means uninhabited. There are those robber tribes[1] which still haunt the outlying mountains, and, when a caravan offers sufficient temptation, swoop down upon their prey. One of our camping places bore the suggestive name of El Aish, "the place of sorrows," and our dragoman explained that "many feuds and wars had happened there." The robbers of to-day are relics of a time when every man's hand was against the desert dweller, and his hand against every man. In many parts of Arabia this is still the condition of matters, and it is obviously natural that a life lived so near the edge of man's most elementary needs must foster the fighting qualities of men. The stock has been "welded into iron by endless strife." But the traveller seldom sees anything of this. The villagers he meets at rare intervals upon the roads, hurrying with what speed they may across the spaces between walls and walls, are indeed armed as copiously as their resources will allow, but the arms are rather for show than for use ; and the firearms would in many cases be too dangerous to him who discharged them to make it worth his while to furnish himself with ammunition. But all through the journey, low and spreading black tents are seen at intervals by day, and lights twinkle in clusters from the ground by night. When you approach them you

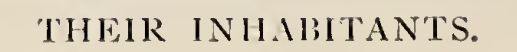
[1] Cf. p. 102.

may see the two spears—tall bamboos shod with metal and tufted with flowing bunches of hair—set upright in the ground before the tent of the sheikh. These are the homes of the shepherd Arabs, that flit silently from place to place as the camels change their pasture. Shy, wild people dwell in them; children in many things, in others aged beyond their years. Above all they are thirsting for news of the world they never visit, and will risk the chance of a mistaken shot to run forward begging for information from Damascus. One such party we drew from their tents, and found them full of laughter and friendliness, ready for cigarettes and liberal with offers of hospitality; but when we took out our cameras the younger ones fled incontinently, and only the elders stood their ground. They were gorgeously arrayed in lemon and saffron garments, covered with a ragged brown abba, and with a cloth protecting their mouths from the flying sand. These men could neither write nor read, but they were flock-masters of a thousand camels, which spread out in long lines as far as the eye could see.[1] After they have

[1] The camel is worth to the Arab not merely his money value in sale. Alive or dead he supplies his master immediately with almost all he needs. Carriage of goods, water, and habitation; milk and flesh for food; leather for shoes and harness and countless things besides; hair for tent and clothes; fuel for his fire,—all these and much more the camel means to his owner. Burton tells the Arab legend of how the camel came to be what he is. The horse had complained to Allah that he was not made for the desert, and his life there was too hard for him. His foot sank in the sand, his back bore but a small burden, his body could hold but a short supply of water, and he could not eat the thorns. So Allah changed a horse in these several points, and the camel was the result. But when the unchanged



BEDOUIN TENTS.



THEIR INHABITANTS.



gone, these lonely dwellers leave behind them traces of their sojourn. Camping-places with circular ovens of blackened stones, and the marks of long-extinguished fires, are seen everywhere. Once we came upon a patch of grass, a little oasis set up on a narrow platform raised a few feet above the level, where the ground was covered with rings and squares of stones, the "houses," of Bedouin children at their play. But the games were of long ago, for the stones and rings were thick with lichen, and the children had grown to old men and women, whose bones had long rested in desert graves.

Very different from the Bedouin population of the desert is the procession of strangers that crosses it. There are very few Europeans on that road—only one or two parties each year. Some go on horseback and some in carriages. But the toil of bumping over the stones and edges of these interlaced pathways must be extreme. We were fortunate in passing a band of pilgrims of the Haj returning from Mecca, and it seemed as if in that motley train all the East was represented. Many were on foot, among them one man in a lustrous garment of peacock-blue, which in sunshine lit the desert like a jewel. Some parties rode on donkeys, and one cheerful little man walked beside a strong grey ass laden with an incredible confusion of household

horses saw the answer to their prayer they were so terrified that to this day they have not recovered from the fright! Which last statement any rider of horses may verify when he is called upon to force his steed through a flock of camels.

furniture. He was on his way to Mosul (the ancient Nineveh), on the other side of Mesopotamia. But the majority of the pilgrims were Persian Mohammedans, whose destination was still farther in the east. For six months already they had journeyed, on foot or on camel-back, day after day. Before starting, in order to prove their story of the journey, they had dyed their beards scarlet, but now there was an inch or two of grey dividing the scarlet with the swarthy cheek and chin — surely the most grotesque of all possible guarantees of pilgrimage! Some of the camels bore pannier-wise a couple of little wooden cages, in each of which an aged man, too old for walking, or even for sitting on the camel-saddle, was swung and jostled across the plains. Their eyes were closed, and they seemed to doze all day, the extreme discomfort which their little shrunken bodies must have felt from the constant jolting forgotten in a stupor of satisfaction at having fulfilled the greatest dream and purpose of their lives. The pilgrims were generally tall grave men, clad in dark robes of brown or green or purple, and wearing on their heads little grey cloth skull-caps, above which in sunshine the flowing white or crimson head-dress would be set. In Palmyra we saw long troops of them arrive, the black lines of the caravans winding down slowly from the Valley of Tombs. In the evening the whole field of ruins was filled with these silent figures, with wonder in their faces and great patience. Wanderers across the world, they looked with the same wide-open eyes of children upon the wrecked magnifi-

cence of two thousand years ago, and upon the unheard-of luxuries of the European encampment, while their camels strayed at will among the pillars of the colonnade. They were as much strangers in a strange land as we ourselves were, for they could hardly speak a word of Arabic. Yet one of them whom we met afterwards at Ain el Beda spoke to us in very tolerable English. It is said that at Mecca English advertisements are to be seen exhibited in the bazaars. This is, of course, for the benefit of Indian Moslems, to whom Arabic is unknown. The road has heard many tongues blending with its ancient Arab speech, and still every year brings across it the children of many lands.

One of the most remarkable features of a desert journey is the steadily heightened tension on the nerves of the party as it goes farther and farther from civilisation. On Europeans this produces the effect of a raised temperature and a quickened pulse. They grow more and more excited, with a kind of exhilarating intoxication which quickens all the senses and magnifies all impressions ; or silent, with a restless kind of stupor. Every passing mood is exaggerated and fixed in strong and undistracted contrast with the featureless scene. On the Syrians the effect is different. Their spirits are high by the village threshing-floors, but as they move out to the open they sink into a chronic depression, and are startled by the slightest sound or sight. It is an Eastern saying often heard, that "in the desert you frighten every one, and every one frightens you." It may be due to lack of knowledge, but it is a fact

that this fear is not as a rule felt or sympathised with by Europeans. Dante's horror of the desert is well known, and in his *Tresor* Brunetto Latini describes in great detail the emptiness of it, and immediately thinks of his approaching death. But it would seem that in order to experience in its fulness the luxury of horror which these describe, one would need to be an Oriental. It is difficult to get them to tell what it is they are afraid of. It seems to be mainly an undefined sense of unknown dangers, composed from tales of wild Arabs and of Afrites (the ghouls of the wilderness),[1] together with the thought of those who have lost their way and perished with thirst and weariness. The escort, with his 1860 Remington, is generally an extremely nervous man, and his timidity spreads downwards through the camp. He is an irregular servant of the Turkish Government, something between a soldier and a policeman. Often he is an old man, long unfit for active service, with an infinite capacity for sleep, even on the march. To confess the truth, his appearance is imposing, with sheepskin coat flung back above the many-coloured saddle-cloth, blue jacket with the brass buttons of the army, and crimson leather boots in his enormous Arab stirrups. But in action he is a grievous disappointment. When we approached an Arab tent, he followed trembling, and suggested to unheeding ears that we were "near enough." When the shepherds came running to meet us, eager for news, he collapsed into

[1] Cf. Matthew xii. 43, "When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none."

a mere bundle of nerves, held his gun across his knees with shaking hands, and screamed out, "By God, I have a good mind to kill them!"

Still more nervous were the men of our own camp. When tents were visible in the farthest distance, they would huddle together in a close-packed moving group, and when asked about it afterwards would invent appropriate tales of tobacco and bread stolen as they passed former tents. On one occasion when we had strayed some miles from the main body in search of Roman milestones, they mistook our white helmets for the head-dresses of Arabs, and urgently entreated us not to leave them any more—an entreaty repeated in vain when the tents were struck next morning. We compromised by allowing one of the most fearful to carry a double-barrelled shot-gun with two spent cartridges in it, and in the struggle between vanity and fear he was too much occupied to discover the precautionary fraud. Of course the fear was increased tenfold by night. Around the camp-fire they forgot their anxieties, and even boasted and laughed over the perils of the day, and made the most detailed arrangements for a start next morning before daylight, but when morning came they would keep us sitting for an hour in the saddle, killing time by all manner of devices with ropes and baggage. At last, after warning them of our purpose, we started without them, and then there arose behind us such a babel of shouting, and of voices whose cry had sharpened to a piercing squeal, as might have called their enemies upon them from the ends of

the earth. The subsiding of these fears as we re-entered the neighbourhood of villages was one of the most amusing of processes to watch. They forgave us then for having refused to desist from our explorations in order to comfort their hearts on former days; but they regarded us still as the natives of India are said to regard the British, as "unaccountable, uncomfortable works of God."

After all, they may well be pardoned, for though the Arab mind has no clear conception of immortality, it has nevertheless an urgent fear of death. And in the desert death is everywhere in evidence. The bleached skeletons of camels are often seen, or the newly-skinned body of a beast not yet devoured, shining in hideous crimson beside the track. As you ride past, vultures rise heavily from the carcase of a horse or mule. Once we found a squared hill, evidently an ancient Bedouin graveyard; but every day, at frequent intervals, we passed the graves of Arabs who had died by the way, and the soldier would explain drily as he passed them, "Many people killed here!" They are the humblest of resting-places, marked by a narrow oval chain of stones somewhat in the shape of a shrouded corpse, with one larger than the rest projecting at the end, to point the dead towards the far-distant Mecca. The Eastern is acquainted with death, but not familiar. He carries his shroud upon every journey, lest he should die upon the way, yet the sight of death unnerves him. There are Arabs in Egypt who used to run up and down the Great Pyramid in seven



A DESERT ROAD.



PRAYER IN THE DESERT



minutes, and make considerable gain by the feat, but who have never been able to do it since they saw an accident there and found the dead man at the foot. And the usual stories of death in the desert are so frightful that it is no wonder if they oppress men's imagination.

The Eastern mind is secretive, and the thought of all concealed and secret things is congenial to it. The Arabic word (*ganna*) for "garden," which appears in such place-names as Jenin (the "garden city"), means "hidden." It is also the same root that is found in the familiar name of the jinns or genii, the mysterious spirits or hidden ones. Now there is nothing which gives a more impressive and a more insistent aspect of the desert than its boundless possibilities as a hiding-place.[1] It is the infinite absence of cover which intensifies this to a point far beyond the suggestiveness of woods or rocks for hiding. The track passed over disappears behind the traveller, until all conspicuous objects in it are wiped clean out. This creates a kind of *entrainement* like that of long forest glades or mountain vistas, but more irresistibly alluring than these. A whispered promise seems to keep imagination ever at the stretch. It is this constant expectancy that partly explains the fascination of the desert, the love of it for its own sake, as well as the fear which keeps the nerves of its children so overstrung. The silence and emptiness are in themselves a wonderfully soothing experience, in which one loses the strain

[1] Cf. *The Garden of Allah*, p. 123.

and pressure of modern life. Now and then some incident intensifies the sense of solitude, as when you lie down to sleep near the kneeling camels which have accompanied the day's march with their blessed gift of water, and wake up to find them vanished—"ships that pass in the night," on the ocean not of water but of land. Yet soon you discover how delusive the appearance of solitude may be. There is much desert mimicry, and the wary traveller, riding his greyish-coloured donkey and clad in an abba of the same neutral tint, is hardly distinguishable from the background against which he is seen, until already he has approached within a few yards. So there comes on all men that suspicion of possible watching eyes—not from gardens only or from behind the walls of houses, but from hollows, mountains, the very stones of the ground itself—which adds to the eeriness of being alone the greater eeriness of probably being not alone. The unexpected sound of a shot, a sudden cry, an apparition of flowing robes, will startle even a bold man to an extent which afterwards he will find quite unaccountable. Even the animals feel it, whatever instinct it may be that imparts it to them. When, for a time, some fold in the plains has deprived them of the sight of the moving camp, the horses will suddenly prick their ears and quicken their pace in strong excitement on emerging to a higher level when they again catch sight of their friends. One incident of this sort, not without an element of pathos, impressed us all. Wishing to copy the inscription on a Roman altar, one of us had

dismounted and tied his horse to a bush. The idle horse, tearing the bush with his teeth, gradually slackened the cord that tied him, and at last finding himself free, tossed his head and was gone. Two of us followed him for a considerable distance as he made straight for the far-off barren mountains on the north-west. For a time he exulted in his freedom, then began to hesitate with slower pace, then stopped, and after looking towards the far-off black speck of the moving camp, he turned to his approaching captors, and without an attempt at resistance let himself be caught. His brief delight in freedom had been mastered by the desert.

He who dwells there feels an unaccountable suspicion that his table is spread in presence of his enemies, as if all the powers of Nature, and incalculable auxiliaries in the shape of possible human foes, are pitted against him. From Karyatein eastwards the Jebel iṭ Tawil flings its mountain-range out into the north-east, and the plain, with its cool and delicate shades of lilac, white, and green, is flanked along the whole way by that far-off line of mountains. The shape of the long range is exactly that of a gigantic spear, with sharp-pointed spear-head, and shaft narrowed for a hand-grip near the western end. It is as if the outpost sentinel of Karyatein stood there, with desert-pointed spear in rest, eternally on the alert.

In such a mood it is not surprising that every stone and shrub gains an extraordinary significance from the vast emptiness which forms its setting. Indeed, the

supreme work of the desert is this power of rendering insignificant things significant. In one place a scatter of empty snail-shells catches the eye, in another a large speckled egg in a hollowed nest. Now a swarm of moths and flying beetles invades the tent; again, for hours on end, lizards are running to their holes around the horses' hoofs until the ground appears to be alive with them. The finding of a solitary tortoise, or a hedgehog, or a dead jerboa or desert-rat beside one of the innumerable holes of these curious little tribes, is enough to give zest to a hot hour's ride; and you watch with an unaccustomed fascination the dung-beetle that rolls its unwieldy ball, or the lizard running fast to cover with the dung-beetle in its open mouth. Gazelle-tracks which cross the route are discoveries of exploration, and the floating of a lonely bird overhead is a noteworthy event. The latter, indeed, has a peculiar interest. Egyptian vultures, or great Griffin vultures, that sometimes measure ten feet between the wing-tips, their feathers full of vermin and unspeakable abominations within their gizzards, are yet in their weird and uncanny fashion welcome presences, though the very spirit of the wilderness seems to float past on their dark wings. But the least trace of human life and its works intensifies significance to a point at which it becomes either the most pathetic sense of brotherhood or the sharpest suspicion of danger. The ovens at which former men have cooked their food, or the naked footprints they have left in now hardened mud, set the most companionable imaginations

wandering far afield. But when the actual figures of men appear, the full power of the desert seems to exert itself in suggestion. In the middle distance all judgment as to size is liable to error. What is seen may turn out to be but a larger bush, or it may be a camel or a horseman, and until you have determined which it is you watch it with a great intentness. Dark-blue colours are the most plainly visible on the skyline—much more visible than red or any other colour,—and men on foot dressed in these colours appear as gigantic shapes against the sky, and you watch for them until they pass you as if great issues depended on their coming.

Such being the physical effects of the desert upon the minds of men, it is no wonder that the spell it casts partakes of the supernatural. Almost every one of the Persian pilgrims whom we met had among the buttons of his coat at least one blue one, to protect him from the evil eye of some malign traveller he might meet. The wind rises almost always at nightfall, and in its moaning the dullest soul must hear mysterious voices. Sometimes, as on the sea, it rises to a tempest; the sand moves in whirling and bending pillars that gleam light yellow against the indigo of thunder-clouds beyond. Nothing in Nature, perhaps, has a more ominous and menacing aspect than those tremendous shadows with the dance of the sand-devils before them like bacchanalian heralds of approaching destruction. In some of his finest lines Robert Browning has expressed the doom of Judgment Day by aid of the metaphor of a desert sand-storm :—

Oh, brother, 'mid far sands
The palm tree cinctured city stands,
Bright-white beneath, as heaven, bright-blue,
Leans o'er it, while the years pursue
Their course, unable to abate
Its paradisal laugh at fate!
One morn,—the Arab staggers blind
O'er a new tract of death, calcined
To ashes, silence, nothingness,—
And strives, with dizzy wits, to guess
Whence fell the blow. What if, 'twixt skies
And prostrate earth, he should surprise
The imaged vapour, head to foot,
Surveying, motionless and mute,
Its work, ere, in a whirlwind rapt,
It vanish up again?[1]

It is no wonder if the drift-sand which lies in calm weather so innocent and weak, but which under the command of storms may become suddenly the savage and greedy minister of death, should assume miraculous properties in the eyes of those who dwell beside it. The magic of the sand-diviner is the most inevitable thing in the world. The genii and magic chariots, the dragons and demons that howl "in the house of thirst," are patent to the eyes and ears of all desert-dwellers.

And, finally, there is the daily magic of the mirage. We in the West are accustomed to think of mirage as a rare phenomenon, appearing at long intervals, and probably exaggerated in memory before it is described. Not the least surprising of discoveries in the desert is that it is the constant accompaniment of the daily

[1] *Easter Day*, xix.

march. For hours together the mountains and the plains undergo the most amazing transformations, until all power to distinguish reality from illusion seems lost, and the mind is stupefied as if with the wonder of strange dreams. Yet, as one traveller has said, it is not that you *think* you see these astonishing sights. By all the ordinary laws of vision you actually *do* see them, and it is said that your camera will bear you out in this. In some places the very stones of the ground lead up to the mirage with a kind of sportive profusion of mimicry. Now they are like stone water-bottles or broken jars, now like whitened bones. In one place we passed through a field littered with apparent cannon-balls ; in another there were innumerable black and white flints like the torn and scattered pages of a printed book. But when the air takes up the work of illusion, it does it thoroughly. Sometimes you seem to catch the secret of the mirage. The shadows of clouds turn as they travel into lakes of dark-blue water. Rising vapours, the cloudland stuff of which certain kinds of mirage are made, wreathing in front of far-distant mountain ranges, cut them into masses like islands in a pearly sea, which rise and sink and split and reunite before your eyes. Everything is elastic and liable to swift changes. The low horizontal outline of a guard-house sharpens to a narrow and lofty tower seen against a purple haze ; the camels beside it appear to have undergone metamorphosis, and to have become tall and waving trees ; the tents rise and spread, till the humble encampment has become an inexplicable erection

from which enormous white and black sheets are waving. A party of muleteers, at the distance of perhaps a mile, have become shrimpers wading in the shallow water of a seashore, only to change again while you watch them into a grove of trees. For an hour together we watched a tract of sand masquerading first as a bay with houses and huts round its farther and its nearer edge, and bosky islands floating on its bosom and actually showing reflections in its surface, until the houses and the islands disappeared, leaving a dark mussel-bed shore at low tide, which changed again, back into mere desolation of fiery sand, featureless and empty. Once the whole company halted, and every man gazed through field-glasses at a troop of horsemen, riding down upon us in a whirl of dust. The faces of the dragoman and the soldier told unmistakably that in their belief the much-dreaded Bedouin raid had come at last. When suddenly, as we looked, there was nothing to see!

Such are some of the facts and impressions of the desert. Yet after those have all been stated, how far off the desert itself still is! Detailed descriptions are but a list of scenes, an inventory of properties; but they are not the play, with its wondrous action and its subtle meanings. The effect of that play upon the spirit is deep and lasting. No one who has crossed it with his heart open at all, returns without some gift from the wilderness. It is not only the effect of sudden revulsions of feeling as you pass from hideous and barren places where Death seems to have pitched his tent, to the living green of the oasis or of the

western hills — that shock of contrast which has inspired the Persian poets to write their songs of trees and splashing waters; it is a great calm and assurance that comes upon a spirit quickened and intensely awake. Passing from the west eastwards across the sea, the continents, and the mountains, the successive phases of human life and the play of many different moral standards confuse you. Men's intellect and conscience seem to be contorted by a thousand warping circumstances and points of view, until the spectacle of the world has become an utterly bewildering phantasmagoria, in which it is impossible to distinguish the essential from the accidental elements, and the universal from the merely local. Then comes the desert, where you find yourself standing off from the noisy and perplexing world, detached from it by many miles of vacant plain and silent mountain. The effect upon the spirit is in a sense sacramental, as if some radical adjustment, or cleansing new birth of thought and feeling, had come upon it. All things sink back to truer proportion, and you discover their actual and permanent values. Trifles of self-will, or fretfulness, or vain desire—the petty and restless intrusions of the poorer self—disappear as the hills sink at nightfall to the horizon. Only the great things remain — the open field of the earth, and the stars in heaven above. These, undistracted by side issues, elemental and sure, depend not on any mood of him who turns to them. Here is mere earth and sky, and they stand for symbols of that which remains when all

else has passed away. Nor are they without interpretation; for here a man knows that he is not alone, and there is a voice that speaks to those that will listen and be still. The Arab hears that voice and understands it according to his lights. He spreads his prayer-carpet on the ground and kneels, his gun laid down behind him, and his horse standing quiet as if he too had heard. And for us also there was a voice interpreting the symbols. The wide spaciousness of earth and the stars that shone above it, what else could they mean than the gift of boundless opportunity and the promise of guidance? For beyond them the Eternal Love, clear to the spirit and responsive, stood manifest across the vast field of wreckage and of flowers. Henceforth when life again becomes entangled, we shall often turn back and remember this elemental view of things—the vision of life as opportunity, and of heaven as love and guidance.



ENTRANCE TO PALMYRA





CHAPTER VIII

PALMYRA AS IT IS TO-DAY

On the fifth day out from Damascus we halted at midday by the well and guard-house of Ain el Beda. Five days is no great length of time, but it seemed as if we were cut off from the past civilisation by half a life-time, for a day in the desert counts for many days. Already the shattered nerves of our Syrians were manifestly mending, and with every hour their spirits rose as they drew nearer to their goal. Everything took on the excitement of arrival ; our pace quickened and we sang as we rode. Not that there was any very manifest change in the landscape. That interminable lance-like spur of mountain lay still upon the right as it had lain for days, and far on the left the other range ran on unbroken as before. Only one thing was clear—the two were nearer. We were approaching the sharp point of the angle within whose arms our route had lain, and that point drew and fixed all eyes. Far in front, where the two mountain-lines met, there was a sun-haze that writhed and shimmered, and the point of convergence was destined to suffer many

changes before we reached it. Mirage swam in the haze, and pictured islands with sheer precipitous sides that floated between promontories of rock in ever changing positions.

At length the vision began to settle down to permanent form. The foreshortening was delusive, and what looked like a short stretch of level turned out to mean several hours of very broken ground with heights and hollows of considerable size. Yet the range on the left fell to lower level over an unmistakable bluff of rock, which we learned had been the quarries of Palmyra ; while on the right the mountains bent over to meet it, falling to lower and lower heights. We were near enough now to see that mountain-side in detail, thrusting out regularly stratified cones, purple and slate-coloured, and sliced sheer so as to expose the pattern of strata. We were too much elated by reaching our destination to pay much attention at the time to the fact that a little hill stood off on the left from the western range, and was crowned by what appeared to be the broken fragments of a ruin ; or that from that hill to the lowest point where the converging ranges met, there ran a subterranean aqueduct, with regularly sunk shafts at intervals of a few yards. Our eyes were on in front, fixed upon that dip which obviously meant the entrance pass to Palmyra.

At that point the converging mountains sank until they disappeared. A row of massive but now ruinous towers rose along the lowest slopes, giving to the pass all the appearance of a fortified gate. Beyond these

towers, on a farther hill to the left, rose an incredible pile of masonry overlooking the natural barricade of the gate, and the desert behind it, and who could say what on the farther side. This, which at first seemed like a mass of petrified lava crowning some extinct volcano, turned out to be an enormous Turkish castle, built during the Saracen wars, but long since in ruins. Where the aqueduct approaches the gates there is a green meadow, a little house at a flowing fountain, and one or two small trees. From that oasis to the angle of the gates there are sown fields, and the waters of the fountain, turned thither in clay channels by the naked feet of peasants, ensure a harvest. This of itself gave promise of the end of the desert and the beginning of human life and the homes of men. But all was yet to learn as to what manner of life we were to find within these gates. For the moment, they themselves were sufficiently impressive to give us pause even when so near the goal. The towers that guarded the pass rose out of the rock, grey and dead, fretted with the decay of ages, untenanted and silent. From within, the castle frowned down upon the gate in sinister Turkish fashion, with less sense of grandeur than of unscrupulous and cruel power. There was an element of terror in the aspect of that "dream in masonry and living rock," to which architecture and geology alike contributed.

The very horses shared the excitement that was on us all as we passed through the "gate," and found ourselves suddenly in a new world. For the moment it seemed

as if we had left the earth altogether. The desert, that had been our home for days, was gone, wholly blotted out by the saddle of the hill now crossed. The view-point of which every traveller tells was not yet reached. We were in a narrow and darkened valley, unlit by the setting sun, and studded with tall square towers of ancient masonry—the gigantic tombs of Palmyra. Only the ruined malevolence of the castle towered high in sunlight above us, while that Valley of Tombs shut us in for a moment among the dead, before it was permitted us to see the city. It was near sunset, and evidently something strange was waiting for us, for even in that valley there was a kind of alpenglow of mystic colour. The tomb towers were uncanny in the light of it, that was hardly light at all, so difficult was it to be sure of objective reality and to distinguish it from the impressions and fancies of the nerve and brain.

Then suddenly we came out, beside a tall tower of the dead, upon the ledge. It was one of the most dramatic spectacles ever flung before men's eyes. It is characteristic of the East, and reminds one of other such surprises. But surely this dip into green darkness, and then the sudden blaze of light and the wonder of the city that shines in it, must be the most beautiful of them all. The ledge is part of a sweeping parabola of mountain, in whose curve lies the plain on which Palmyra is built, some two or three hundred feet below us as we stand there. To the right, the eastern arm of the parabola is a darkening hill-side with tomb towers



GENERAL VIEW OF THE COLONNADE, PALMYRA





breaking its skyline, behind which the sun is setting. But to the left, the range runs north from the Turkish castle, full in sunlight, and radiant with rose-coloured rock and sapphire shadows in the clefts.

As for the city lying on the plain in the embrace of those great mountain arms, what words can describe it as we saw it then? A few fragments of dark Roman wall flung round it at various periods (chiefly that of Justinian), and an aqueduct running its straight line across an angle, appeared like tattered cerements torn from the body of one long dead. Within, in a square mile or so of fawn-coloured earth, lay the city in all its beauty and in all its sadness. Over the whole expanse, broken masonry of white or orange limestone was scattered in endless confusion—"a tumultuous sea of stony fragments." Out of the sea of wreckage arose here a temple, there a massive wall, dotting the plain like islands. But across the centre ran one straight line, the line of the ancient colonnade. From its base, where the façade of a temple still stands at the foot of the castle hill, the line of columns may be traced, with intervals where earthquakes have thrown them down, up to the triple arch at the eastern end. The arch fronts the wide vacant space of the ancient market-place, on whose farther side stands the blunt cubical mass of the mighty Temple of the Sun. Beyond that a dusky fringe of green shews where the palm-gardens lay, and where some relics of them still remain. Beyond that again—beyond everything but the mountains to the north—stretches the desert, level as a board, a dim

expanse that fades with distance from rich brown through orange to a marine blue, and finally to an indigo dusk upon the far horizon. One solitary column, left stranded far from the colonnade upon the farthest edge of the field of wreckage, seems to point the way into the eastern distance looking towards the Euphrates and Persia.

From the height at which we stood the buildings were diminished to miniature, and the colonnade and temples were like delicate lace-work torn, or the shattered ivory carving of some Indian artist's manufacture. Every detail was in proportion, and the general effect was dainty beyond description. But the magic of that evening lay mainly in the colour of the city as it caught the afterglow :

> A rose-red city, half as old as time.

In the morning, the colonnade is golden on a green ground—the delicate faint green of sparse desert herbage that grows in separate bushes among stones. But the evening is full of the witchery of colour. Those who have wondered at the evening brightness of the stems of fir-trees—purple below and golden above, as if the smooth boles of the upper branches were so in love with the sun that the light they had caught from him was now flaming in themselves—may realise something of how the afterglow shines from orange limestone. Those who can remember the moment when they first caught sight, in an evening light, of those dreams in stone, the Pyramids of Ghizeh, will be able to add the spiritual

wonder of the scene. The lace-work of the rows of columns, and the mass of the temple wall to which they led the eye, shone in rosy light as if they were translucent, and the fires of sunset had steeped them to their inmost substance, and become a secret fire within them, luminous and delicate beyond any light that shines on land or sea. That was Palmyra as we saw it for the first time, from the ledge of the great tomb tower.

As we descended slowly in the evening light, the shining city seemed to rise and expand about us, till at last, when we had entered the colonnade, the great size of the pillars astonished us as they towered above the tents and dwarfed them. Excavations, whose remains are still visible in trenches dug about the bases of some columns, show that in former times the height must have been about a third greater than it now is. Yet even now, the parts of the columns that rise clear above the ground measure on an average some fifty-five feet. It must have been a magnificent place indeed, when the living city stayed the drift of sand that has been encroaching through so many centuries of death. We found our tents pitched in the angle made by the Arc de Triomphe with the line of the colonnade, just below the market-place. The days were warm, and we were glad to let down the side of the tent for air and coolness. Through the gap we looked out upon that wonderful field of wreckage that might have been broken alabaster, the wreck of war and earthquake, now exquisite in its abandonment, while the lustrous

hermil plant and here and there a kali, added its touch of Nature and of green. Everywhere were ruins, bare to the sky, or half-buried in sand, or almost wholly buried, with only some inches of finely sculptured scroll protruding. It was long before the wonder of that scene had passed sufficiently to allow of any exploration. Even then, when we went forth to photograph, it was with a twinge of conscience, as if our intrusion were an impertinence.

There is much wreckage in the world, and all our modern structures rise from out it. On the shore of Alexandria, near the wave-washed rocks which once held the Pharos, a railway station stands on the site of the ancient library ; while between the sites of Cleopatra's palace and her grave new villas are built upon foundations formed of collected heaps of broken pottery and dressed stones, solidified with cement. The whole shore lies dishevelled and untidily strewn with fragments of the past—modern guns unlimbered rusting side by side with coins and vessels of nearly two thousand years ago. Nothing more disheartening could be seen anywhere than those sands on which so many centuries have mingled their debris. In Palmyra it is very different. The city lies where it has fallen, its ancient beauties unmingled with any modern thing. Rows of as many as twenty columns stand intact, and their entablature unbroken, here and there. As you walk along that colonnade, you encounter a thicker and thicker mass of fallen blocks, until, near the façade at the western end, the pillars lie complete as an earthquake



SOLITARY COLUMN, PALMYRA



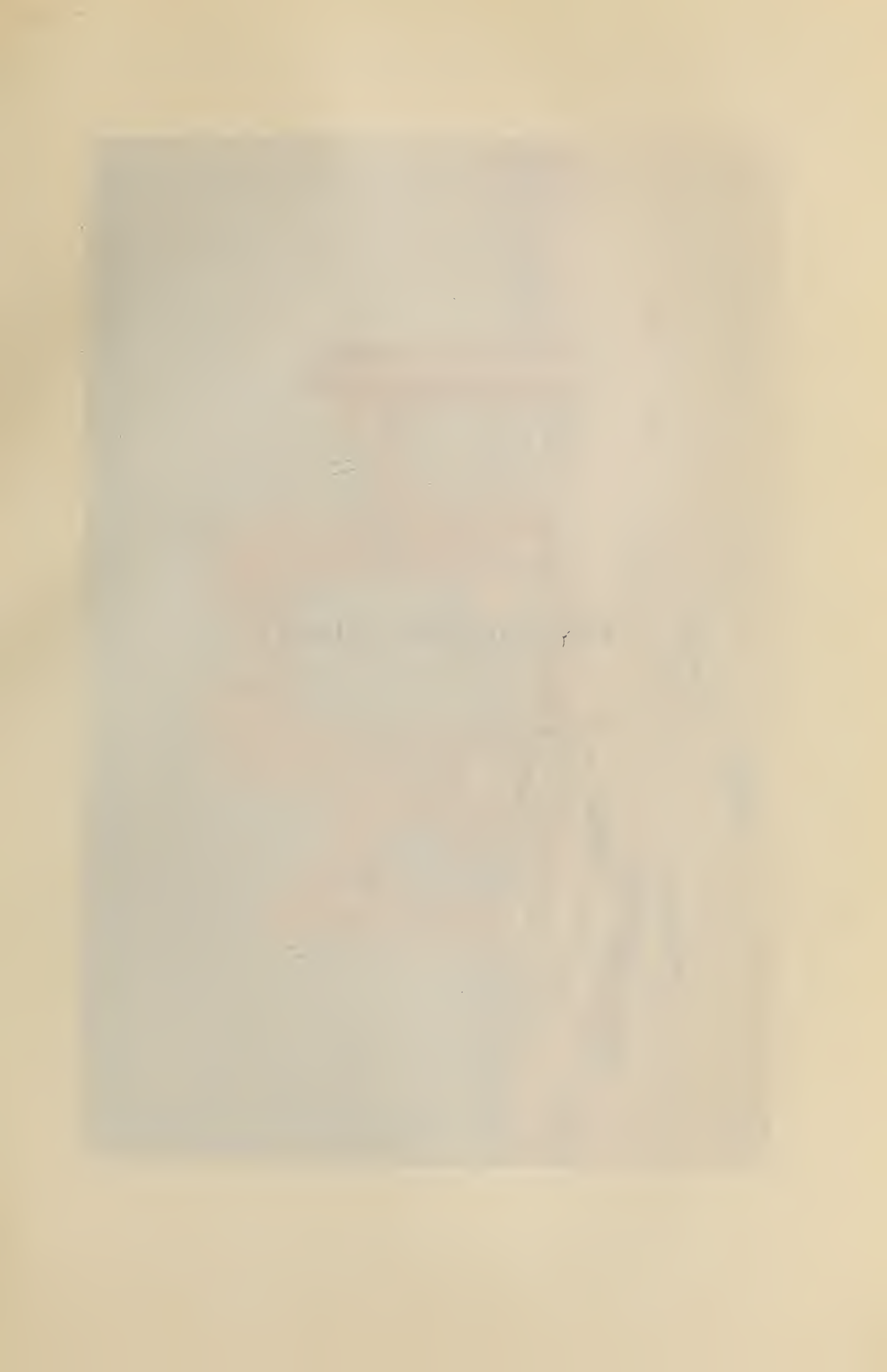


overturned them, and the whole neighbourhood is one pathless maze of exquisitely carved cornices and pediments. Almost all the public buildings are fallen, save one temple—the "Temple of the King's Mother," standing complete but buried for a third part of its height in sand. Near it is the great mass of the Tetrapylon, at which point the direction of the colonnade is changed in a slight angle, to give a more striking appearance to the long sweeping line than a dead straightness could secure. On this block, now perched upon by a few idle natives, much business was transacted in ancient days, and it is even rumoured that it was here that Rome and Palmyra met and came to terms. Of private houses, hardly any vestige now remains. Here and there a lintel and door-posts, and one half of a great door, cut from a single block of stone, its hinges still unbroken, stand in a moraine of broken blocks. Aurelian destroyed the city, so far as it was possible or convenient for his engines to destroy it. He swept the smaller buildings down, and left to earthquakes the destruction of heavier piles. Beyond the little temple nothing remains standing towards the East but that solitary pillar which we have already noted, the loneliest and saddest thing in all Palmyra, left like some belated sentinel still gazing for help across the waste toward the rivers, and turning away from the destroying West and the noise of Roman chariots and horsemen. Those who have heart for it may ramble over the tumbled blocks to the foot of the western hill, and, winding their way among broken tombs, may

climb to the Turkish castle. A deep moat surrounds it, and the stone bridge is broken. From the moat the climb is precarious, and there is little to reward it. The castle is an alien there, and Palmyra, that sleeps so deep below, knew nothing of it.

Much of the wealth of Palmyra has been removed to the museums of many lands. Until lately (so we were told) there was a fine altar that lay on the hill-side near the tombs. But a carriage drove one day through the gates, and with stone saws the inscription was cut away and the carriage drove off again. No doubt such monuments will find safe lodging in their new lands, and yet it is pitiful that it must be so. In their cases ranged in a museum, these carved stones will doubtless edify the young. But they will never reconstruct the city, nor give the remotest hint of the beauty and the pathos of that field of wreckage. They will but give the usual sense of the infinity of the universe, and make the uninitiated feel how intolerable the universe would be if it were all as tidy as this. Not there, but here, could Volney have written that famous first chapter of his *Ruins of Empires*—here where a fallen city lies so beautiful still in its decay.

The tents were, as we have said, pitched at the great arch which ends the colonnade at the south. Turning southwards, and passing through the gateway of the arch, you find yourself in the market-place—a wide vacant space, sparsely strewn with blocks of stone and the usual meagre vegetation of hermil bushes. On the higher ground at the northern side



TRIUMPHAL ARCH, PALMYRA





stands the vast mass of the Temple of the Sun. The wall which faces you as you approach is comparatively intact, an ornamental wall of finely proportioned architecture, some sixty-five yards in length. That outer wall runs unbroken round the east and south sides, though on the south it has lost its straightness and leans over with a slant like that of an Egyptian temple. The western front by which you enter is built up to a great height, but this is Saracen building. Blocks of carved stone, fragments of columns, cornices, lintels, are all massed in a strong but meaningless and confused structure of heavy masonry, blindly facing the west, unpierced by a single window. These four walls enclose the court of the ancient temple. The temple itself (the *naos* or shrine) stands within, facing not west like the court, but north and south. It has long been used, for the larger part of it, as a Mohammedan mosque, from whose darkness you emerge into a little court of broken walls but brilliant sunshine. Here was the holiest place of all, and the famous six-rayed star and zodiac are still to be seen carved on a fragment of roof overhead. From the magnificence of the ancient worship to the squalor of the modern and the sullenness of its dull minister, what a change ! "The Sun he is God ! the Sun he is God ! "—the words echo in your soul as you cross through that stupid and ill-kept mosque to the open sunlight of the holy place. Could some pagan of the Palmyrene days return, how he would wonder at this cast-iron and clay substitute for the gorgeous god of old !

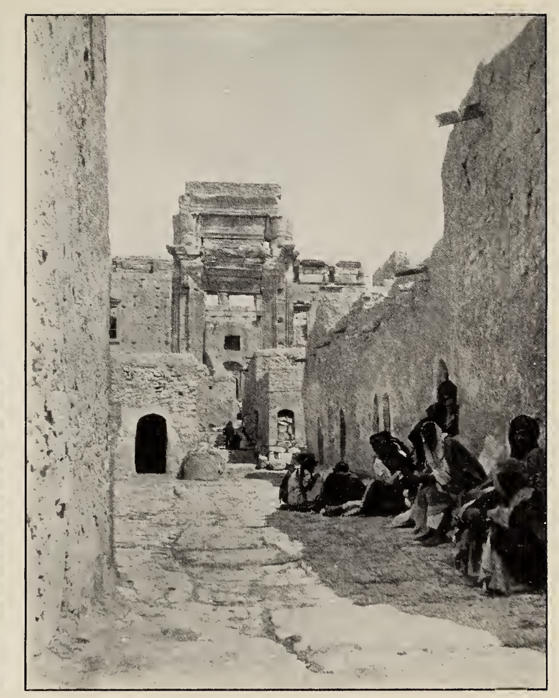
Until lately the inhabitants, who belong to a great Arab tribe but are of little account among their fellows,[1] dwelt wholly within the shelter of the temple-court. Entering through the western gateway, you first pass the door in the Saracen patchwork fortification wall, and then within that the truly magnificent gate of carved stone that gave entrance to the court in old days. But that lordly gate leads now but to a mean street. From it to the door of the shrine itself runs a lane flanked on both sides by low flat-roofed houses built of light rubble and mud. These are the abodes of the modern inhabitants, and at their doors the men stand, idle all the day so far as one can see, to gaze at and discuss the strangers. These mud-houses are more like wasps' nests than any other thing. They have overflowed the temple court now, and the house of the young sheikh himself[2] is outside its gate, as is also the village school, and a considerable ring of houses of no more worthy construction than those within. But of course the inner space is coveted, affording shelter from the weather, and from enemies, if these poor folk can be supposed to have enemies; and the inner community is packed so close together that an epidemic or a fire is a ghastly thing to think of. Right through the roofs of these worthless mud-huts, clustering within the court, rise the stately and massive pillars

[1] The local tribe is that of the Anazeh. To this tribe the waters of Palmyra are a necessity of existence, and the rulers of Syria have found that their possession of the town was guarantee of the subjection of the tribe. (Wilson, *Picturesque Palestine.*)

[2] Cf. p. 152.



TEMPLE OF THE SUN, PALMYRA, SHEWING NATIVE HOUSES AMONG THE COLUMNS.



ARAB VILLAGE INSIDE THE COURT OF THE TEMPLE OF THE SUN, PALMYRA.



of the ancient temple. Some of them retain their capitals, carved in the florid style of late Corinthian work ; others, whose capitals were in ancient days of bronze, have been stripped by robbers or by warring tribes. The people evidently feel no sense of incongruity between past and present. To them the buildings of nobler men of old are but part of the world as they found it, like the mountains and the water-springs. Indeed, so little reverence have they for the ancient buildings, that they are to be seen driving donkeys among the ruins, with a stone—often a stone carved in fine tracery by Greek chisels—slung across his back in either pannier. These stones will serve as well as any others to form part of the rubble beneath the mud of a new hovel. It is maddening to the stranger, here as in so many other places of the East, to see those splendid ruins become quarries for the ignoble buildings of lazy men. Even from their own point of view it is foolish policy which destroys the only thing that makes their village valuable to the world. But that is an old story. The Saracen fortification which towers above their street had already done its best to leave nothing worth defending, by the vandalism of its building.[1]

[1] This is an old story. In the fourth century, "The public officials became very lax or corrupt in permitting the demolition of structures which were often interesting from ancient associations or artistic beauty. The Emperor Majorian, in his too brief reign, exerted himself to check this vandalism and greed. He denounces, with genuine indignation, the criminal negligence which had long permitted the beauty of the venerable city to be defaced in order to provide cheap materials for mean private

The men are very idle. There may be some light work done in the gardens, but except for the goat-herd driving his black flock home among the ruins we saw nothing done but talk. They sit smoking in their street, or come to gaze upon the tents, dressed in brilliant but unspeakably dirty clothes. The one thing in which any enterprise is shewn is the surreptitious sale of curios. Of that you will see nothing when a soldier is within sight, for the Turkish Government happens to be awake at present to the value of such things. But when we were strolling alone among the lanes outside the wall, we were soon surrounded by a crowd eager for commerce. First came from her door a tall middle-aged woman, her face blue with tattoo marks, and her coarse hair dyed light red, offering us coins for sale. No sooner had she advanced than every door opened, men and women and children thronging round us with fragments of enamel, beads, every imaginable trifle that the earth had hidden since the old days. And there was much human nature in that crowd of merchants, for behind its noise and pressure a buxom but very unwashed damsel was carrying on a fine flirtation with a stalwart youth whose bundle of curios lay unopened in his hand.

The choicest treasures that the Palmyrenes can offer are the carved heads of statues, which must have been

buildings. Any magistrate for the future conniving at an infringement of this law is to be punished by a fine of fifty pounds in gold, and any subordinate official similarly guilty is to be flogged and have both his hands cut off." (Dill, *Roman Society in the Last Century of the Western Empire*, p. 203.)

incredibly abundant in the city's palmy days. These are dangerous wares, and a short time ago a particularly fine head was brought to a traveller's tent under cover of night, and with the most prodigious concealments. The traveller, in view of the difficulty of transit, shewed no eagerness, but the man begged him to accept it for one shilling, rather than let him incur the risk of carrying it back again from the tent. A similar offer was made to ourselves, but the man came in daylight, with the head hardly concealed in his robe. This of itself was suspicious, but the explanation was not long delayed. On examination it appeared that this head had lost its nose and mouth, which had been somewhat crudely reconstructed with plaster of Paris. We departed from Palmyra without any spoils, knowing that trouble awaited all such possessions at the custom-house of Beyrout. It is not every traveller who can gauge the exact moment to compliment the examining officer on his excellent French accent—a ruse which, however, has been known to succeed, presumably owing to the amazement of the officer at finding himself credited with so very unexpected a virtue.

The home life of the hovels is apparently cleanlier than one might expect. The rooms, which often open upon dung-heaps, are nevertheless tidy within, and well arranged as to colour, though somewhat dingy. On the roofs, palm leaves and branches are laid out to dry in the sun, and the women do all the work. They soon fade, these hard-wrought women, and you may

see them while still young with breasts withered and brows deep furrowed with wrinkles below the universal dirt. In one house an old man lay in heavy sickness, and while the doctors of our party examined him he turned grateful eyes upon them. But the woman who was nursing him scowled bitterly upon such interference, shrugged her shoulders, and said, "It is from God." The procession of stately figures of women carrying water-pots to the well is graceful, as that sight always is, and the gathering there is the main event of their days. Once we were surprised by it, while two of us were washing our clothes there. For the well is a running stream, the very aqueduct of Zenobia, and the place alike for washing and for drawing water is a little subterranean chamber quite near the great arch. One or two of the ladies modestly refused to enter when they saw us, bare-armed, labouring anxiously with excellent and familiar brands of soap; but the bolder ones came on, and great was the change in the colour of the stream when they had finished their laundry. Beyond such commoner pursuits, there is a kind of sewed-work for which the community is noted. To the unlearned eye it is indistinguishable from cross-stitch upon canvas in large patterns of blue and red. But it is evidently held in honour, for samples of it are hung like banners round the walls of the younger sheikh's dining-room.

On the whole, one's memories of these people are very pleasant. The children, shy and excitable, vanished when we held out our hands to them, but always



MOHAMMED ABDULLAH, SHEIKH OF PALMYRA





returned to gaze at a safe distance, plump, electric, dirty little flashes of brilliant colour in the sunlight. The lads who accompanied us on our walks among the ruins were good companions, idle to a wonder, and yet in their fashion intelligent. They did not know how old they were, and would reply to such a question, "Look at me and see." But they knew many other things, of greater practical value. The sheikhs, senior and junior, were gentlemen and friends.[1] They welcomed us with grave courtesy to their city; they drank our coffee and smoked our cigarettes, and in return they made us their guests at strange meals in their houses, and sent us great bunches of roses whose fragrance filled the tents. The Turkish Mudir (or rather his deputy, for he himself was then at Deir) received us most courteously on the rich carpets of his white-washed audience-chamber, and stood to be photographed in his courtyard with the courageous bearing of one who faces the cannon's mouth unflinching.

Few European travellers visit Palmyra. We were one of five parties which were there in 1906; but during the previous year there had been only two. None of our camp-servants but one had previously seen the city, but they showed no interest or curiosity. The mules and donkeys lay strewn in blissful rest along the ground, and the men, in an equal content-

[1] The old village sheikh's name is Salih; the young sheikh is Mohammed Abdullah, a far-travelled man. He was one of the most intelligent and delightful men we had the good fortune to meet on the whole journey.

ment, squatted here and there. The faded glories of the past were nothing to them in comparison with the vivid facts of idleness and *haruf*. The latter luxury had been promised during the difficulties of the march. These men eat little as a rule, and that the plainest bread stuff. Now a *haruf* is a sheep; and when we arrived at the arch the sheep was sacrificed upon a broken pillar. It was cut in half and roasted for two feasts. At each the nine men sat in a circle on the ground, and the great mass of roast flesh was laid upon a "lordly dish" of rice and melted butter. We arrived on the scene only a few minutes after the start, but by that time the eighteen brown hands had torn the meat to fragments, and not a particle was left. Partake we must, however, for good fellowship; and one of the muleteers, thrusting his hand into the mess, squeezed hard a ball of rice and gave it to us. It was eaten unflinchingly, with the proper wishes for their health; while the cook, a facetious fellow, added, "Eat, O my friends, eat abundantly; and if you eat too much there is the doctor to give you medicine!"

Apart from its nobler interests, Palmyra remains in the memory of the traveller a place of winds and waters. Hardly for an hour during the five days of our stay did the wind fall to a dead calm. Sometimes hot with desert sun, sometimes bleak and chilling, but always blowing, night and day. Yet every evening it rose, and nightly blew so hard down through the pass and over the mountain, that the only hope for the tents was to fasten them with guy ropes to columns.

One night it rose almost to a hurricane, and in a few moments drew from the sand all the tent-pegs. As the upright sticks of the tent-sides were hammering upon the beds there was nothing for it but to rise and secure them. And this was probably the only incident in the journey which involved actual danger. For the tents were guarded by a Palmyrene, provided with a loaded gun. Under ordinary circumstances he would have been asleep, but it was just possible that so heavy a tempest might have wakened him. Even then, the crawler in pyjamas, emerging from below the tent-side, had still the benefit of the improbability that the man should hit anything that he aimed at—but there was the ugly off-chance. All went well, however. The guard was snoring with his back to one of the columns, and the pegs were re-driven without bloodshed.

The waters, to men who for five days had been on scant allowance, were even more memorable. There is an aqueduct that flows beneath the ruins only a few yards' distance from the arch. To one of the two cavernous chambers through which it flows, we went immediately on arriving. The water is warm, and it is strongly sulphurous, but it flows in a strong and steady current about a foot deep and two feet broad, as it has flowed since the days of Zenobia. We stripped in the dark and lay down in it, and seldom does there come a moment of more exquisite physical comfort than those which that ill-smelling bath afforded. But that is a poor affair compared with the great chamber in the hill-side. About a mile from the arch, in the angle of

the tomb-studded hill, there is a natural cave out of which a larger stream than that which we had found underground breaks forth, and is led off in an ancient conduit of cut stone. The water here is at blood-heat, and it is more strongly sulphurous than the other, so that this fountain may be found easily by night or day. The arch at the opening is low, but it soon rises to a natural vault several feet above the surface and four or five yards in breadth. As you advance the water deepens and the darkness grows more dense. Soon you are out of your depth and in absolute darkness, for a bend in the cave conceals the entrance. But we had provided a wooden board, on which we fixed at either end a candle, and pushing the little light-ship in front of us as we swam, discovered the farther end of the cavern a few hundred feet within the hill. The strong chemicals, or perhaps the colours of the rock, or both, gave the weirdest effects of dark green and brown whenever a swimmer moved a limb. Seen under such conditions, his familiar friend grows strange to a man, and he wonders what manner of man he himself may be—a thing of darkness whence emanate continually unholy lights.

CHAPTER IX

PALMYRA AND ROME

THROUGHOUT the whole of this, as of other parts of the nearer East, the traveller is constantly coming upon memorials of the ancient Romans. The railway track as it descends the Barada Gorge to Damascus keeps well in view for miles the obvious Roman road just across the river, with its aqueducts and niches and tombs. Milestones and memorial inscriptions with the customary DNCONSTANTINO (*domino nostro Constantino*), or similar records, abound in that region. One typical milestone reads—

DN
CONSTANTINONOB
C S
STRATA
DIOCLETIANA
A PALMYRA
ARACHA
VIII

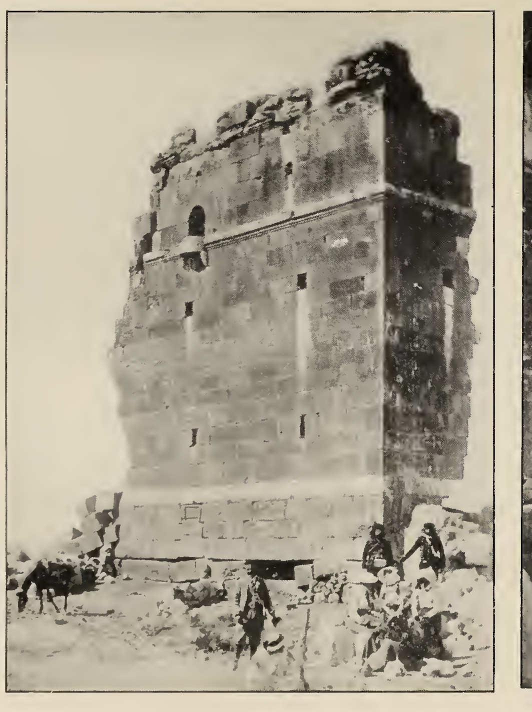
(*Domino nostro Constantino nobilissimo Caesari stratat Diocletiana a Palmyra Aracha VIII.*)[1]

[1] Wolfe, *Expedition to Asia Minor*, p. 634.

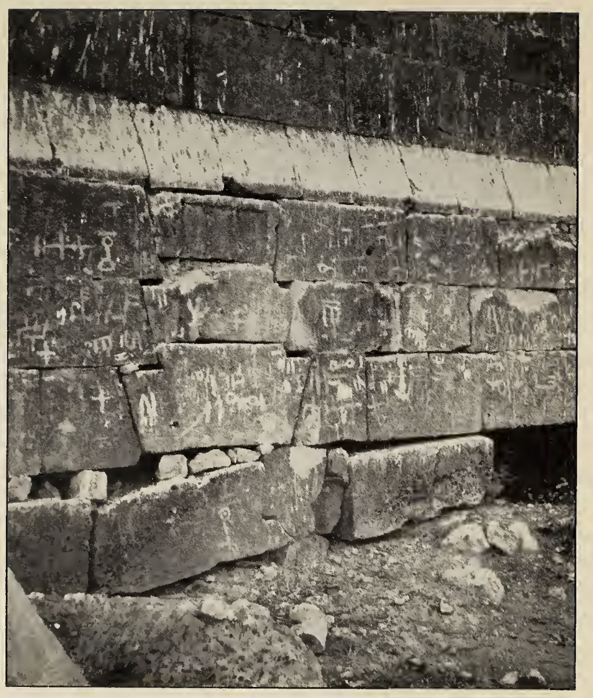
At Atni, the last place reached before entering the desert, on the direct route from Damascus to Palmyra by Jerud, there is a monumental stone to Hadrian.[1] About half-way between Karyatein and Palmyra the greatest and most impressive landfall of the desert, turned out, after long riding, to be the section of an immense Roman tower or barracks, split down across its breadth, probably by earthquakes, and showing as strong a piece of masonry as might be found anywhere in the world. Great black birds with long curved bills, wheeling majestically about the ruin, were the only breakers of its silence. The Arabs had inscribed its stones with many *wusms*, or tribal marks, so that it had become a kind of standard by which the brands on camels strayed or stolen might be identified. Beside it an Arab shepherd had been lately buried, and his grave was simply marked by his club and staff, driven into the ground at its head. About an hour's ride to the north of this tower the featureless plain bore upon it the mark of man's hand in three broken pillars that stood near a low eminence, squared and levelled, which may well have been a Roman camp.

But there was one Roman road upon which in particular we had set our hearts. From Homs to Palmyra the fine map of Von Oppenheim's book shows a straight track across seventy miles for the most part desert. It was from Homs (then Emesa) that Rome advanced upon Palmyra, and it was by that road that Zenobia and the fragments of her defeated

[1] Le Bas-Waddington, 2562.



KASR EL HER.



WUSMS ON THE STONES OF KASR EL HER.



army retreated upon the city. A spice of additional interest was added to this road, by the fact that it is seldom taken by European travellers, and that Baedeker suggestively informs his reader that the route over the hills is the safer, "the route across the plain being more exposed to the attacks of the Bedouins." This is the road which Sterrett began to follow, finding one or two of the first milestones, but abandoned after six miles, "as we had to make a ten hours' journey to reach water at night, but we saw that the road ran far away to the north of the present caravan road to Homs (Emesa). It seems clear, therefore, that these stones were on the road to Hamath-Epiphania, and not on the road to Emesa."[1] We were more fortunate, in the fact that we prepared ourselves for two days of waterless journey by hiring camels with loads of water at Palmyra. Our leader, most cautious of men, was consulted. He was little flattered by the assurance that this arrangement was a high token of our implicit trust in his character and wisdom, but he was able to screw his courage to the point of sticking to his bargain; and, with the air of one resigned to death, told us that he was there to follow our instructions. That was all we wanted, but our instructions were bitter hearing for the good man. He was instructed to lead us by the Roman road to El Dariri, near to which lay a spot known as El Aish (the place of sorrows), where we might camp in the open for the night. Every spot of the desert, however featureless, is named; and the

[1] Wolfe, *Expedition to Asia Minor*, vol. iii. p. 648.

explanation of those desert names would unfold a tale of human interest that would have no parallel in the world. But that tale will never be told. The incidents are forgotten with the death of the generation in which they occurred—only the names remain, a vast vocabulary of adventure and of tragedy to which there is no key, but every syllable of which stirs the imagination.

The first object that caught our eyes on that westward march was the projecting fragment of a rounded arch half-buried close to the gate of the pass above Palmyra. In a few minutes we struck the line of that underground aqueduct already referred to.[1] Similar aqueducts are described in Morocco—"rows of shafts sunk deep in the earth—row upon row of deep funnel-like openings running for miles . . . aqueducts formed by digging these shafts, 60 feet apart, and then tunnelling from the bottom of one to another." There is said to be a complete network of such tunnels below the plain of Damascus, and so, doubtless, these were made long ago. That these shafts and tunnels were of Roman workmanship there can be little doubt. The shafts were sunk forty feet or so to the aqueduct, and cased in the solid masonry of great blocks of stone, and the stones at the mouth of the shafts have been grooved to the depth of six inches by the ropes of the thirsty generations. As the ground sloped gently downwards towards the gate, the depth of the shafts increased as we journeyed westward. Near the gates,

[1] Cf. p. 214.

the water came to the surface, and within them was led to the city along a high-built aqueduct near the Wall of Justinian. Retracing its line you look down deeper and deeper wells, until you can no longer see the water, but only hear it, now flowing fifty feet below the surface.

The probability that this was Roman work was heightened by the fact that the line of the aqueduct led westward in a straight line towards that little hill (Kerasi, "the chairs"), where we had noted the fragments of dressed stone on the outward journey. Following that line back now, we climbed the hill, and, for an omen, there rose from the summit an eagle as we came, and flew to the north-west. The carved stones we had observed proved to be the pedestal and fragments of a single column apparently of no great height or size. It was now apparent that the aqueduct should no longer be our guide, for its line ended in the saddle of the hill on which we stood, no doubt tapping a perennial spring, for there was a very green patch of grass and flowery herbage there. These were sweet waters, and, although the Palmyrenes have always avowed a preference for the sulphurous, yet there must have been some uses at least for which the other was preferable.

But what had been the use of that solitary pillar? No further ruins were to be found on the hill-top, nor were there any apparent signs of former foundations. If, as appeared to be the case, the column had always stood alone, the use of it may well have been to serve as

a landmark, a lighthouse for desert navigation, leading men from afar to the haven of Palmyra. Seizing upon this hypothesis, we eagerly scanned the horizon for any clue. At our feet lay indeed a vast parade-ground well fitted for the exercising of cavalry and chariots, but as to any traces of paved work, or of the wheel-ruts in stone that are so often found in Syria, what hope was there in that sand-blown wilderness, where the level had risen, and the sand and clay of the surface lay trackless to the north and west? Not indeed quite trackless, for our baggage-animals and their attendants were in sight, a diminishing speck that moved slowly along the modern path. That track, sagging in a great loop, and in detail winding out and in, was certainly not the Roman road. A ruin, however, caught our eyes not far from the foot of the hill, and for that we rode. It consisted of a few mounds, near what seemed to be the foundation of an ancient house. But from it we saw another break in the level, and with heightened expectation crossed a mile or so of ground towards the west, and came to it. Here was a better-defined foundation, with door-portals and slabs of apparently ancient workmanship. The work was plain, and there was nothing to tell its story, but from these stones we descried, a mile or two still farther to the west, a couple of pillar-looking objects, to which we at once rode on.

They turned out to be two great altars, beside which was the broken pedestal of a third. They were of equal size, and bore inscriptions in Greek and Palmyrene. The Greek inscriptions are identical, but





1. PILLAR AT EL KERASI.

2. THE FIRST LANDMARK—ANCIENT DOOR-POSTS.



in the collection of Le Bas-Waddington (No. 2627) it is stated that there is a variation in the Palmyrene versions. Each altar bore an emblem, apparently the engraved likeness of an eagle. The top of one altar was pure white, that of the other stained a dusky red. The Greek inscription ran :—

> *Δ**ιι** ὑψιστῳ και ἐπηκοῳ ἡ πολις εὐχην. Ετους εκύ, Δυστρου ακ΄, ἐπι ἀργυροταμιων Ζεβειδου Θαιμοαμεδου και Μοκιμου Ιαριβωλεους και Ιαραιου Νουρβηλου και Ανανιδος Μαλιχου.*

The names are Palmyrene, one of them being actually that of Yaribol, the Baal of the city. The date is March 21, 114 A.D., and the inscription tells that these altars were erected in honour of the town's treasurers.

This seemed promising for further traces of the road, but just at this point the incident occurred which has been already narrated.[1] One of the horses strayed and we had to follow him. Hardly had we started, when we found our first milestone, and knew ourselves upon the road we sought. The stone was evidently embedded deep in the ground, but some three feet of it protruded, at a slanting angle. We left it, counting upon some record in the British Museum to enable us to finish the inscription, one glance at which had tantalised us with the name Zenobia. Alas, for the horse that strayed! The stone is recorded duly (2628 Le Bas-Wadd.), but this is the note: "At 150 steps from the altars, upon a transom of a pillar which has the

[1] Cf. p. 205.

appearance of a milestone . . . the rest of the inscription of Zenobia ought to be found under the earth, but I had absolutely no means of getting at the bottom of the milestone." And all that is known of that record is, "For the safety of Septimia Zenobia, the most illustrious great-queen (Βασιλισσης), the mother . . ."

Now we were surely on the road at last, and for two days' journey we followed it with no other guide than milestones and other roadside memorials of the ancient Roman days. We found that it led, not (as Sterrett imagined) to Hama, but straight towards Homs. Our camp jogged along the winding path, some miles to the east of us, and when we met at night we were entreated vainly to keep together and not to leave them again. They had mistaken us for raiding Arabs, they had missed us more than their nearest and dearest. But they had trudged along a path on which there were no inscribed stones, and we set our hearts like flint against them.

No sport could be more exhilarating than this chase of milestones. Sometimes they came regularly, with the distance between them an exact twenty-seven minutes' riding, and we had hardly left one when the next came into view. Sometimes one was missing, but the ruins of an old guard-house, a mud-built khan now occupied only by the bones of beasts, showed suspicious fragments embedded in the walls. From the native point of view nothing could be more clearly providential than the presence near the builders of such a stone. Surely this also was from Allah, and

to pass it by would have been rank folly bordering almost upon sacrilege. Elusive stones of all sorts threw us off the scent, appearing great in the distance and turning out to be of no importance when reached. Sometimes milestones had been curiously tampered with (during some former mending of the road, according to Sterrett), for the 18th milestone comes at the regular interval next after the 13th. For the most part they were buried to such a depth that no more than one or two feet of them protruded. Only one stood at its full height, of slightly more than six feet, upon a squared pedestal one and a half feet high. Some lay on their sides in broken pieces. They were easy to recognise and distinguish, for they were all of alabaster-like white or orange limestone, and had evidently been brought along the road from Palmyra or from some other similar quarry.

As for their inscriptions, only a few of those way-marks bore writing on them. Others were either bare or marked with *wusm* signs by Arabs, while many were covered with lichen. By far the most interesting which we saw, next to that of the Zenobia inscription, was one farther out from Palmyra, bearing a very mutilated record, of which the only decipherable words told that the colonia of Palmyra dedicated it to the honour of Diocletian, and included the name Antiochus. Regarding this inscription, Le Bas-Waddington (2629) remarks: "This Antiochus is probably he whom the Palmyrenes clothed with purple when they revolted against Aurelian, after the first capture of the city.

Antiochus and Apsacus are both mentioned by Zosimus, the best-informed author regarding Palmyrene events. One or other ought to be the Achilleus mentioned by Vopiscus, and whom he calls *Parens Zenobiæ*."[1]

Altogether these were memorable days, spent in following a road of which never one paving-stone was seen—a phantom road, traced only by the monuments that once stood by its side, when it ran a visible straight line that cleft the desert. The very fact that it was underground added to its charm. About the whole region lay this spell of an almost unrifled world, never thoroughly searched, and now almost unknown. Crossed but by trembling Arabs, or an occasional band of raiders, it still bore to the imagination its ancient significance. Such roads carried the stride of Rome outwards from the centre to the ends of the world, and men realised first through them the unity of mankind upon the face of it. It was a great message, greatly though often bitterly told.

When, early in the second day, the track enters the region of low hills, that shine in a strange billowy expanse of vivid white and green, there are no more milestones, but carved stones of greater size grow more frequent, and the tracks of carriage-wheels begin to appear. Here we found a heavy block hollowed into a basin, with escape-pipe cut beneath; there a heap of dressed stones, reputed good for the cure of rheumatism, on which the muleteers solemnly lay down for a moment as they passed, and one

[1] Aurelian, 30.

facetious person carefully rubbed his head upon it. On the map a "Roman Tower" is marked. But, whatever the foundation walls may have been, the superstructure is Arab work, and very poor at that. Several large squared mounds are passed, which may well have been camps of the Roman armies. Brilliant or rusty, according to the thickness of their covering of poppies, they are worth a visit for the immense quantities of what appears to be ancient broken pottery that are to be found on them — testifying to the eternal significance of water in so thirsty a land. Here and there, villagers are watering their beasts from troughs which are ancient sarcophagi, or sowing their crops in land that shows many lines of ancient entrenchment. Not the least striking of all the Roman memorials on that road is the name of the village of Furklus, for that is no other than the modern survival of the Latin *Proclus*.

In order to understand the very subtle and complex relations which existed between Rome and Palmyra, and which proved so fruitful alike of tragedy and romance, it is necessary to glance back for a moment at the history of the Eastern policy of Rome. The biographers of the Emperors are held in small esteem by modern historians compared with that vast multitude of inscriptions which have been unearthed between Persia and the Mediterranean, each telling its own fragment, and by some casual word or phrase of far-reaching significance adding a new fact for the historian. So numerous are the monuments that lie strewn upon the region of our

special interest, that it would be impossible to give even the briefest summary of their information without becoming tedious to all but the students of archæology. Name after name of the Roman emperors occurs, on stones laid low as those dead emperors themselves, proclaiming for 1800 years to the desert winds a glory of which the men who travelled past them knew no more than they knew of the language graven on the stones. Here, on the edge of the desert beyond Jerud, the seventh cohort has immortalised the memory of the wife of "our lord Gordian," that ill-fated emperor. There, on a little hill to the east of Palmyra, Wood found in 1751 (but a hundred years later it is gone, and Le Bas-Waddington cannot find it) the lordly record: "Reparatores orbis et propagatores generis humani domini nostri Diocletianus et Maximianus invictissimi imperatores et Constantius et Maximianus nobilissimi Caesares castra feliciter condiderunt curante Sossiano Hieroclete viro perfectissimo praeside provinciae devoto numini majestatique eorum."[1] But of all these records the greatest and most appealing is one at Jabrud, marked in Le Bas-Waddington 2566, to which the note is given, "In the exterior wall on the right of the church, M. Girard de Rialle remarked a stone built in bearing the fragment of a Latin inscription of which he could read nothing but the word CÆSAR." Nothing but that word! and it is enough to suggest the story of five centuries of turbulent human life.

It is to Mommsen's great story of the Provinces

[1] Le Bas-Waddington, 2626. Wood and Dawkins, 27.





1. ALTARS NEAR ROMAN ROAD.

2. THE ROMAN MILESTONE.



that we turn for the best results alike of ancient historians and recently discovered inscriptions. As we read its history of Roman work in Syria from the earliest contact to the days of Zenobia, there flashes past our eyes an extraordinarily brilliant succession of the incidents of wild romance. The Arabian desert and the Euphrates were ever the weakest frontiers of the Empire of Augustus and his successors, and the desert expeditions of Rome were often disastrous.[1]

It is sometimes supposed that Rome was actuated, throughout her whole Imperial period, simply by the lust of world-conquest. But, though her wilder and more romantic spirits may have taken Alexander the Great for model, the finer genius of men like Augustus in his later days held a wiser if a less brilliant policy.[2] Westward, indeed, the world had boundaries apparently manageable, and beyond the Pillars of Herakles there was but Britain to reckon with, although in the West also it would have been well for Rome if she had accepted narrower limits. Eastward, the game of conquest was infinite, and the wiser spirits recognised that the world was too wide for them, and sought a satisfactory boundary. "Rome knew, as a limit, in a strict sense, only the sea or a land-district unarmed."[3] It was between the rivers Tigris and Euphrates that she sought to establish such a district, to be a buffer-state bounding her Empire on the east, and holding off the

[1] Cf. Townsend, *Asia and Europe*, 200-204.
[2] Cf. Arnold, *Studies in Roman Imperialism*, 191, 214, 223.
[3] Mommsen, *Provinces*, ii. 21.

illimitable forces of the farthest East. But that land between the rivers had Persia for its eastern neighbour and Armenia on its north. Persia, since Alexander the Great conquered it three centuries before the Christian era, had been but a glorious memory, whose traditions were, as they have always been, of boastfulness and brilliance. To these traditions had succeeded the race of the Parthians. Entering Mesopotamia and Persia from the lands to the north-east, their princes fixed their abode at Ctesiphon. Terrible men to meet as enemies, hardened like the nomads to a life whose discipline was such that they were said to transact business and eat their food on horseback, these were the riders upon red and white horses who inspired with such horror the writer of the Apocalypse. With such a race in possession there was little chance of the wiser policy of Rome being adopted. "The historical position of Iran," says Mommsen, "is determined by the fact that it forms the bulwark of peoples of culture against those hordes who, as Scythians, Sacae, Huns, Mongols, or Turks, appear to have no other destiny in the world's history than that of annihilating culture."[1] But the Parthians who now held Iran belonged originally to the latter class. "The Parthian Government in the earlier Imperial period was as little able as the Turkish Government of the present day to secure to the peaceful subject the fruits of his toil."[2] At length (227 A.D.) the Parthian power in its turn decayed, and, under a new Artaxerxes, who claimed

[1] Mommsen, *Provinces*, ii. 18. [2] *Ibid.*

descent from Darius, there arose a new Persian kingdom where Parthia had been.

Armenia was the cause of the most constant and acute troubles.[1] A nation of merchants, and the centre for exchange of goods from China and India to the shores of the Mediterranean, it swung to and fro in its allegiance between Rome and her enemies. So the whole story is one of extraordinary complications, and he who tries to follow its detail seems to be looking through a kaleidoscope of history at a constant succession of surprising incidents. For, in the unstable equilibrium of the region of the rivers, the possibilities of surprise were boundless. Against a confused dazzle of constantly changing history, we watch certain strongly-marked figures playing out their tragic drama. There was the meteor-like campaign of Mark Antony, beginning in the design of creating a great Oriental kingdom, and ending in a headlong retreat—three hundred Roman miles in fifteen days—with short water and shorter food, in which at least six thousand soldiers perished. His brilliant powers both of generalship and of endurance were unbacked by that iron will which is necessary to really permanent achievement, and the fascination of Cleopatra ever entangled him. It was poor compensation for the Roman eagles lost on that ill-fated expedition that, a hundred years later, Tiridates of Armenia was forced to take the Royal diadem from

[1] "The sovereignty of the Romans over Armenia," says Mommsen, "played a part in history similar to that of the German Empire over Italy." (*Provinces*, ii. 74.)

his head before the eyes of the two armies, to receive it again kneeling in the market-place of Rome. So victory alternated with defeat until Trajan in 116 crossed the Tigris, and, mastering the whole country of the Parthians, retired, taking with him the golden throne of their king. Trajan's objective was the mastery of the great commercial markets of the East. Mommsen says of him: "He did what Cæsar would have done had he lived. His policy is but the other side of that of Nero's statesmen, and the two are as opposite as they are equally consistent and equally warranted. Posterity has justified more the policy of conquest than that of concession. For the moment no doubt it was otherwise. The Oriental conquests of Trajan lit up the gloomy evening of the Roman Empire like flashes of lightning in the darkness of the night; but, like these, they brought no new morning."[1]

So the tide of war ebbed and flowed during the three centuries of Palmyra's greatness, and the eastern boundary of the Empire swung to and fro between the rivers.

Had it not been for the Parthian, Persian, and Armenian wars of Rome, we should probably have heard but little of Palmyra. The references to "Tadmor in the wilderness," in 1 Kings ix. 18, and 2 Chronicles viii. 4, as a city built by Solomon, were long held as proof of its ancient greatness. But that view is now untenable.[2] The city referred to was Tamar, in the land

[1] Mommsen, *Provinces*, ii. 70.

[2] Cf. W. Robertson Smith, art. "Palmyra," in the *Encyclopædia Brittanica.*

of Judah, and the name was changed to Tadmor either by the Chronicler or some later scribe. It is true that from very early times there must have been a settlement there, for its abundant waters and its half-way position between the Euphrates and the Lebanon must inevitably have given it importance such as is assured to all oases. From time immemorial it must have been a meeting-place of many caravan routes. But the kind of importance which an Arab city achieves in virtue of such advantages may be seen in Jowf or in Hail—places which in comparison with ancient Palmyra were but as a kraal of Hottentots to Zanzibar. It was the Roman advance which created the new Palmyra. The earliest of its inscriptions dates from the year 9 B.C.; there are but a few later than 272 A.D. The first contact with Rome of which we know was hostile. Antony, attempting to take the city, was repulsed, and forced to desist from his design by bands of Palmyrene archers. But Palmyra was useful to Rome, and indeed almost indispensable, so long as the balance swayed in Mesopotamia. True, her easiest route to the rivers was through Asia Minor upon their upper waters; or by Antioch and Aleppo due east to the Euphrates. But then there was Armenia to reckon with, and until Armenia was finally brought under the yoke, these northern routes were often practically impossible. Next to them, on the south, was the route by Emesa and Palmyra, and thence to the middle regions of Mesopotamia. Finding a place so valuable to her aims, both from

a military and a commercial point of view, Rome was not slow to appreciate the opportunity and to make the most of it. It is not known at what exact time Palmyra became part of the Roman Empire, but it is supposed to have been not later than the reign of Augustus. From the first the conditions were so peculiar as to demand special arrangements, and the relations between Rome and Palmyra all along were unique. In 130 A.D. Hadrian made his famous journey to the East, and new favours were granted to the city. She received the *jus Italicum* and became a colony, the visit being also commemorated by the erection of new buildings and the conferring of the name Hadriana. So useful a vassal, and one so difficult of access, was worthy of special consideration. In regard to tribute and to local government, the city rose and flourished on special terms.

Such a position was necessarily a dangerous one. The very indeterminateness of the relations between the greater and the lesser state, together with the immense and rapid growth of wealth and prosperity in the desert city, were necessarily full of temptation to Palmyra and of anxiety to Rome. "In every collision between the Romans and the Parthians, the question was asked, what policy Palmyra would pursue?" [1] As a matter of fact the Palmyrenes seem to have regarded Parthians and Romans alike mainly from the point of view of commercial assets, and to have been guided in their relations with both by their

[1] Mommsen, *Provinces*, ii. 92.

desire for the advancement of trade. These issues were brought to a test in the middle of the third century. And the crucial moment, which decided the fate of Palmyra, was that which added to the more sordid motives of commerce the mingled idealism and ambition, the beauty and the cleverness, of one of the world's most famous women.

CHAPTER X

THE *COUP D'ETAT*

ONCE, now some six years ago, the writer, wandering among the villages of Lebanon that look down upon Beyrout and the sea, came upon a chapel built by a mission of English Quakers. It was a simple structure, but one curiously cut stone caught the eye, built into the otherwise unremarkable side wall. On inquiry he learned that that was a stone from the aqueduct of Zenobia. From that day onwards the name of the desert queen kindled the imagination, and that cut stone recalled her memory from the realm of ghosts and fiction to a notable fragment of actual history.[1] Those five years of history were indeed romantic, and if the barest and most literal truth were told of them as they really were at their red heart, the tale would be one of the greatest romances in the world. Their story of illusion, passionate endeavour, and tragic and ruinous defeat falls like a splash of blood or fire upon the grey years of

[1] The road which leaves Damascus for Palmyra is still spoken of as The Zenobian Way.



THE SERAI, PALMYRA.



THE QUARRIES, PALMYRA.



desert history. Every shadow turns to purple in the desert, and in the obscurity in which our scanty and often unreliable records leave the facts, there is much purple fiction. It seems hard to part with it, and it has been the fashion of modern popular writers rather to increase than to diminish its volume. Yet surely they need not have done this. When the flying rumours have been discounted, the facts that remain are enough to tell a very living story of the human heart and will; of hopes that soared far into the future, and of a final and unbroken darkness of despair.

In 251 A.D. the fall of Decius had left the Roman Empire apparently in the power of the Persians, who were then reviving, east of the Tigris, the glories of the ancient Persian kingdom.[1] Sapor, their king, was a man whose ambition knew no bounds. Calling himself the Great King of Iran and non-Iran, he set himself to match the Roman Empire and conquer the world. Armenia and Mesopotamia first became Persian, and then poured their peoples across the desert toward the West. Valerian, the Roman Emperor, met the advancing tide at Edessa. He is described as an honest man, but neither resolute nor brave, and within a few years of the fall of Decius he too had fallen. Antony, on his terrible retreat, had an attendant ready to kill him in case he should be in danger of falling into the hands of the enemy. Valerian was of a different spirit; he was captured and carried eastward across the rivers, one

[1] Mommsen, *Roman Provinces*, book viii. chap. ix. p. 99.

among endless trains of captives who, "led like cattle once a day to the watering, covered the desert routes."[1] Rome disowned him and left him to his fate. The legend, which at the time found wide credence, told that the savage Sapor, when he would ride on horseback, had the fallen emperor brought out and used him as a footstool from which to mount his horse, planting his foot upon his neck.

The successor of Valerian was his son Gallienus, a pleasure-loving *dilettante*, who, in the crisis of the Empire's fate, spent his time in arranging spectacular processions at Rome. When the Persian onset was at its height, he found himself interrupted in his pleasures by other rebellions besides that. Nation after nation rose in revolt,[2] and to further complicate the situation, Callistus, a self-appointed Roman leader, attacked the Persian throne and drew the king back across the desert to defend himself. But it was not for Gallienus that Callistus fought. Along with Macrianus, another Roman general then in the East, he renounced allegiance to Gallienus, and in 261 proclaimed the two sons of Macrianus emperors—an arrangement which Egypt and almost all the East at once accepted. One of the usurpers went westward and fell at Illyricum. The other remained in Syria.

Then came the moment for Palmyra. Gallienus had

[1] Mommsen, *Roman Provinces*, book viii. chap. ix. p. 101.

[2] Orosius maintains that the invasions in the reign of Gallienus caused quite as much misery and terror as the invasions of the reign of Honorius. (Oros, vii. 22, 7, quoted by Dill, *Roman Society in the Last Century of the Western Empire*, p. 265.)

enough to occupy his attention in the quelling of the Western rebels. Had Palmyra sided with Persia at that moment, the East had been irretrievably lost. The Prince of Palmyra at the time was Septimius Odenathus, a man of conspicuous ability both as a statesman and a soldier. It is said that his first idea was to seize the opportunity for throwing off the very light yoke, if yoke it could be called, that Rome had imposed upon Palmyra, and in return for which the Roman occupation had brought to the city the quietness which it had enjoyed for almost three centuries. He made offers to Sapor, but in his blind arrogance the Persian repulsed him as a mere Arab sheikh. In anger he espoused the Roman cause, fought and defeated the Persian armies as they were returning to the rescue of their capital, then met the usurper who had stayed in the East, and at Emesa routed him and so secured the Empire for Gallienus. He even led an army across the Euphrates and relieved the siege of Edessa, the town at which Valerian had fallen, and, in short, re-established the sway of Rome from the Tigris to the Mediterranean.

Then follows a chapter of history full of complex questions, to which it will probably never be possible to find a full answer, although the general outlines of the story of events are not difficult to discern. The difficulty is in determining the exact position of Odenathus before and after his victory. The popular version of the story is, that Gallienus, in a heat of gratitude, proclaimed Odenathus joint-Emperor with

himself. Trebellius Pollio[1] expressly tells us that "Odenathus, King of the Palmyrenes, obtained the Empire (*imperium*) of the whole East." And lest there should be any question as to the meaning of the word Empire, he adds that after new victories won by Odenathus and the conquest of the whole of Mesopotamia "Gallienus divided the Empire and gave to Odenathus the title Augustus."[2]

Were it possible to accept as true this very simple version, which is not corroborated by any other author, there would remain no mystery in the story of Palmyra's downfall. But apart from the fact that the name Augustus is not found on any coin of Odenathus, and the further undoubted fact that he continued to treat the Emperor as his superior lord, sending the captives and booty of his victories to Rome to adorn the triumphs of Gallienus, there is the further fact that for such an Emperor to divide the Empire with any other would have been impossible. Indeed, it has been asserted that the loyal officers of the Roman army bore Odenathus no good-will for even such a measure of authority as he had, and that it was from them that the accusation emanated of his having first tried to make terms with Sapor before attaching himself to Gallienus.

What then was it that happened which was to lead so soon to the tragedy of the end? Before attempting to answer that question, we must first inquire as to

[1] *Vita Gallieni*, 10.

[2] "Quod et senatus et urbs et omnis aetas gravitanter accepit."

the original position of the headmen of Palmyra, and then as to the family of this particular prince. The traditional form of government was republican, or at least thoroughly democratic. The city was governed by the council and people (*ἡ βουλὴ καὶ ὁ δῆμος*), as appears constantly on the monuments. It was administered by civil officers with Greek titles. But along with them there was chosen a *ras* or headman of the state. This man was of Roman appointment which conferred senatorial rank, but he was chosen from a leading family of Palmyra, no doubt in accordance with the desire of the citizens. The appointment was for life, and the honour came to be hereditary, passing down along the male line of his descendants. Thus it will be seen that the headman was virtually a prince, not otherwise dependent on the Legate of Syria than were the client-princes on the neighbouring imperial governors generally. He enjoyed the further dignity of having an appointed deputy, to whom was entrusted the local administration.

Three men of the famous princely family which immediately concerns us are mentioned on the monuments —Septimius Odenathus, his son Septimius Hairân, and Septimius Odenathus, grandson of the former prince of that name[1] and husband of Zenobia. It is possible that the name Septimius may have been given by Septimius Severus to the family in recognition of services rendered during the Parthian wars at the beginning of the third century. The memorial of

[1] The name thus alternately recurs, in accordance with the custom of Palmyra.

the first Odenathus is inscribed on a great stone which is now set as the lintel of the gate of the modern village. It was formerly part of his tomb. Hairân, his son, had a statue placed to his honour by a soldier of "the legion of Bostra" (*i.e.* either the 3rd Cyrenian or the 3rd Gallic legion, which was then encamped not far from Damascus). He is described as chief of Palmyra, and as the "illustrious senator" (*i.e.* of senatorial rank).[1] His rank, and the fact that a soldier of the legion then in the vicinity should have thus honoured him, show how cordial must have been his relations with the Empire. It is significant that the date of this statue is 251, the very year in which Decius was defeated. It is possible to see in this signal favour something of doubtful omen. If the heads of Palmyrenes were turned and they took themselves ultimately with a fatal seriousness, it would certainly appear that Rome did her best to encourage this. But all that was as yet on the knees of the gods.

The statue of Septimius Odenathus, the more famous son of Hairân, had beneath it the following inscription: "Statue of Septimius Odenathus, the illustrious consul, our lord, which has been set up to him by the guild of the goldsmiths and silversmiths."[2] The date of this statue is 258 A.D., in the month of April. From its inscription it appears that Hairân had handed on to his son the high office of headman, and that a new honour had been bestowed upon the

[1] Cooke, *North-Semitic Inscriptions*, 125.

[2] Cooke, *ib.* 126.

family by Rome. Hairân was but "the illustrious senator"; Odenathus was "the illustrious consul." He is ὑπατικός, or *vir consularis*. Now this title in the third century generally implies that a man has actually held the office of consul. But in Syria it has merely the force of a consular legate of the province. Le Bas-Waddington points out that the fact that the son of Odenathus subsequently inscribed the same title on his coins points to a honorary title, "consul-allectus," which was introduced in the latter part of the third century to gratify "a large number of ambitions and vanities." This honorary consulship would imply nothing beyond the fact that he had received the insignia of consulship (*ornamenta consularia*). Nay, more, it would tell against the imperial gift, for the title ὑπατικός would be possible only to a subject, and Mommsen regards it as a proof that the assumption of the imperial title is imaginary. It must, however, be remembered that the date of this inscription is three years earlier than that of the crisis in which Odenathus saved the Empire for Gallienus. It is surely not improbable that that deliverance should have been marked by some new honour; and if the hypothesis of his being raised by Gallienus to the joint possession with himself of the imperial throne be rejected, it is at least probable that, without formal appointment, Odenathus after 261 A.D. held the position of "independent lieutenant of the Emperor for the East."[1] We

[1] Cooke definitely states that in 264 A.D. he received from Gallienus "the title of αὐτοκράτωρ or imperator, a title beyond that of governor or vassal

shall soon perceive how these rising honours tempted the ambition, if not of Odenathus himself, at least of Zenobia and the Palmyrenes.

Before passing on to the next stage of the drama a word must be given to one further element in the story of Odenathus. One so much occupied abroad must have depended more than most princes on his deputy, on whom the local administration must have largely devolved. The deputy of Odenathus was Septimius Vorodes. His Palmyrene name was Worod, a name which has been sometimes confounded with Herod by historians. That, as has been conjectured, Worod was a son of Odenathus, there is not the slightest ground for supposing; although the common name of Septimius may point to some connection between the families. Three inscriptions have been found in his honour—two in 263 A.D. and one in 264. It will be noted that the date indicates exactly the time when Odenathus must have been away upon the Persian and Emesa expeditions. Worod would then take the military command of the city, and would act as the chief civil authority. That the council and people should have selected for such signal honour this imperial officer, shews that his must have been an altogether exceptional position, "not substantially different from that of the Viceroy of an Eastern king."

With the death of Odenathus, Zenobia comes at

king," and conjectures that this gave rise to the above-quoted statement of Trebellius Pollio.

once to the front of the story, and with her an immense glamour of romance. As you sail of an evening out into the Mediterranean from the harbour of Alexandria, and the city turns to gold in the magic light of Egypt, the spirit of Cleopatra seems to possess the shore where once she lived out her passionate days. So, in the still more wonderful magic of Palmyra, when sunset is changing the city to a dream, the spirit of Zenobia seems to return and haunt the ruins. Dead queens of golden cities both, and the lady of the desert the more fascinating spirit of the two. Like her own Palmyra, she was a pearl in uncouth setting. Dead so long ago, her spell remains. She has indeed received but little courtesy at the hands of some who have told her story. But she has cast an altogether unique spell over the imagination of all who have an eye for the picturesque in history. Chaucer's Monk had caught that glamour when he told of :—

> Cenobia, of Palimerie quene,
> As writen Persiens of hir noblesse,
> So worthy was in armes and so kene,
> That no wight passed hir in hardinesse,
> Ne in linage, ne in other gentilesse ;

and it is not unworthy of remark that it was her name that Nathaniel Hawthorne selected for the uncanny lady of his *Blithedale Romance.*

So much was the romance of Zenobia felt by those who were her contemporaries, that many picturesque legends, once received as facts, must now be either

abandoned or at least left for ever doubtful.[1] The story, for instance, of which Ware makes so fine a chapter, of the sons of Zenobia appearing during the games in the amphitheatre of Palmyra clad in the imperial purple, her daughter Julia meanwhile burying her face in her mantle, shrivels into the controversy as to whether Zenobia had more sons than one. A few short inscriptions and coins are the most authentic monuments left to us of the glory of the desert queen. Yet it was inevitable that these picturesque legends should arise, for that is how the Oriental mind sees life and the world. Indeed, this element of the romance of the East has much to do with the whole story. Rome's want of imagination is proverbial. Her sobriety of thought and her all-absorbing consciousness of the doom of law, explain alike her immediate successes and her ultimate failure. Conventional with a deadening conventionality, she succeeded in driving her iron plough through the fairest dreamlands of the world. But she never understood either the peoples whom she conquered, or their dreams. When a woman like Zenobia confronts a man like Aurelian the event must always be well worth watching. And if we have lost a few daringly romantic stories, we have gained a far subtler and more wonderful romance. The drama of Palmyra is the inner drama that was developed and played

[1] Cf. Mommsen's note, p. 106 :—"All the details which are current in our accounts of Zenobia originate from the imperial biographies ; and they will only be repeated by such as do not know this source."

out in the mind of the queen. We can watch step by step her progress in temptation, her growing blindness to the facts, and her magnificence in pride, until all these fell together, and brought down with them the destinies of a nation, and the power of one of the world's most brilliant spirits.

As to the family whence Zenobia sprang, it is impossible to go beyond conjecture. She bore the *nomen gentilicium* of Septimia, but that was probably adopted on her entering the family of her husband. The Syrian form of her name is Bath-Zabbai, or Bath-Zebeida (the daughter of the merchant) ; and it may be taken for granted that one of the most important families of Palmyra is indicated.[1]

It is evident that in Zenobia we have a personality of the most striking kind. The devotion of her subjects was fed by many qualities. Personal beauty and the power of charming ; masculine strength and energy of physical powers ; a careful education in the philosophy of the day, added to an extraordinary natural sagacity ; finally, a boundless and passionate ambition for herself, her son, and her city, backed by a courage which knew not the name of fear, and an

[1] In the Palmyrene text of an inscription one Zenobius is called Zebeida. This Zebeida was of a Jewish family, as was also, apparently, Zenobius the son of Airon whose name Wood found on an altar near the larger of the warm sulphur springs. In the court of the sheikh's house at Karyatein there is a stone inscribed by "Zenobius of Nazala (Karyatein), son of Moschus, high priest." Yet another Zenobius, the father of Julius Aurelius Antipater and the son of Akopaos, is commemorated on an altar found by Wood and Dawkins in the eighteenth century and now preserved in Oxford. (Le Bas-Waddington, 2571, 2571[a], 2571[b].)

arrogance which hated the mere suspicion of control,—these were the qualities which made history in the short and meteor-like period of five years that intervened between her husband's death and her own downfall. Odenathus was murdered at Homs in 266 or 267 A.D. The deed was attributed, apparently by a confusion between him and his son, to the Romans, but it seems really to have been committed by his own nephew. So little is known of these events in detail, that suspicion has even hinted at Zenobia as the murderess, and Gibbon strongly repudiates the suggestion. It is true, however, that the fatal vision of Empire was the dream, not of Odenathus, but of Zenobia, and that from the time when she succeeded to his position at the head of the state the scheme advanced with the most amazing swiftness and intrepidity. The two men of most commanding influence about her Court were Zabdas, the general in command of her forces, and Longinus, the learned philosopher and disciple of Plato. In what follows, nothing is more remarkable than the spectacle of this little trio of conspicuous personalities—the soldier, the philosopher, and the woman—standing up in the Syrian desert *contra mundum*. No two counsellors could possibly have been more dangerous to one in Zenobia's state of mind just then. And perhaps of the two Longinus was the more to be feared. Her military instincts—she used to ride in full armour to battle with her troops—were dangerous enough ; but the touch of philosophy, like the religious enthusiasm of Joan of Arc, gave to her spirit the impetus

that would crash through everything to the end she had in view.

We do not know, as has already been confessed, what may have been that "ordinance wrung from the wretched Gallienus by necessity,"[1] or what exactly was involved in the unique position held after his victories by Odenathus. Whatever it was, Zenobia fastened on it in a way which Odenathus never did, and pressed it to the utmost limit. Its very indefiniteness was dangerous to such an imagination as hers, and it was inevitable that she should lose her head among these floating and indeterminate titles of greatness, which might mean so little or so much. So out of the purple East rose the mirage of an Empire. This was the meaning she found in the gift of Gallienus, and this was what she set herself to realise. The later history of the Empire was soon to shew that it was by no means so insane a dream as might have been imagined. He who has considered how far the East is ever distant from the West, and how much farther distant they were then than now when improved means of travel and of transport have so greatly reduced their physical distance, will see in the conception of Zenobia but a foreshadowing of that division of the Empire into east and west which Diocletian was to inaugurate but twenty years later. Nay more, the difficulties which Rome always experienced in her contact with Orientals, and her actual and frequent defeats suffered at the hands of Arabs, must have made Zenobia's

[1] Mommsen, *Roman Provinces*, 108.

scheme appear, not to herself only, but to many of the wise and prudent, one easily within the bounds of practical politics. Yet there is nothing of which one feels more persuaded when walking across that narrow belt of ruins at the foot of the barren hills, than the utter hopelessness of any such ambition. The city at its best can have compared with Rome but as Mantua does in Virgil's famous Eclogue. The son on whom she placed such hopes seems to have been a worthless and impossible child of luxury. The armies at her command were composed of many different bands of Orientals, terrible indeed while victorious, but subject to panic and held by no real loyalty to Palmyra or its queen.

None of these considerations, however, deterred her for a moment from her pursuit. In spite of the wild fever of ambition, that makes us hold our breath as we watch its reckless daring, she played a game as subtle as it was dangerous. It was a clever woman's game, and the time was favourable for it. Gallienus was dead, and could no longer disclaim the favour she asserted. Claudius was running his swift career, fully occupied with wars against the Goths. Zenobia did all that she did under the pretext of realising the control of the East, which it was easy to represent as having been committed to Odenathus by the dead Emperor. Such a pretext is elastic enough to be explained as meaning either everything or nothing according to the exigencies of the occasion. She accused the Roman officers who resisted her schemes,

of rebellion against imperial orders. It was always open to her to explain her policy away, and ask what any had to accuse her of. Yet no man knew what she aimed at, and few were sure of what she did. Thus, innocently so far as the law of treason went, but very subtly, she held on her course, making, as she thought, for one far-seen event, and every day drawing nearer and nearer to the dangerous edge.

The domain of Odenathus, while it nominally included Egypt and Asia Minor, as a matter of actual fact comprised only Syria and Arabia, with perhaps some sort of acknowledged lordship for the moment over Armenia, Cilicia, and Cappadocia. Zenobia's first object was to consolidate the whole East under her sway, making the nominal Empire real, though as yet carefully concealing her designs by observing, for the time being, all due deference to Rome. The key of the situation was Egypt, and thither accordingly the scene of the central drama now shifts. For the moment, as it happened, Egypt was attached to Rome by a very loose thread, and was easy of conquest. If we may believe a legend which certainly accords with the known temper of Zenobia, she regarded Cleopatra as in some fashion an ancestress of hers, and was dazzled by the now long-faded splendours of her reign. Just then an influential Egyptian summoned her to the occupation of Egypt—such coincidences often happen when they are specially in accord with plans and devices already demanding action. Le Bas-Waddington, in a curious note regarding Odenathus,

says : "One cannot understand with what resources he was able to take command of the Roman armies in all Syria, to make war against Sapor, and to conquer the revolted generals. He could not have done such things with the resources of Palmyra alone, nor in his quality of prince of that town."[1] Yet within a few years after her husband's death Zenobia was able to despatch no fewer than 70,000 men to the Nile. There Zabdas met Probus, the Roman admiral, at the Egyptian Babylon, and so completely routed his troops of the Egyptian levy, that Probus committed suicide ; and when Aurelian came to the purple in 270 A.D. he found Palmyra fully established in its rule in Egypt. Zenobia followed the Egyptian victory by an attack on Asia Minor, pushing her garrisons westward there, to complete the unification of the Eastern Empire and its detachment from the West before the final break with Rome.

Meanwhile, cautiously and yet with far-reaching purpose, she was working in a new set of titles which might at once hasten and prepare for the new *régime*. The growing honours which we have seen coming to the family of Odenathus seem never to have stirred that modest prince's ambitions. The highest title used by him in his lifetime was that of Vir Consularis. It was otherwise with his wife. She hoped one day to be hailed as Augusta (Sebaste) in Palmyra. But that title was possible only to the wife of an Augustus. Coins were struck in Alexandria on which the names of

[1] 2602.

Odenathus and his son Vaballathus appear side by side, and the title Augustus is cautiously given only to the dead Odenathus. In Palmyra no such title could have been safely bestowed, but for so subtle a mind as hers it was not difficult to find an equivalent. In 271 A.D., five years after his death, the famous statue of Odenathus was erected on its pillar in the colonnade, and the inscription beneath it was as follows :—"The statue of Septimius Odainath, King of Kings, and restorer of the whole city. The Septimii, Zabdas, general-in-chief, and Zabbai, general of Tadmor, the most excellent, have set it up to their lord."[1] The title "King of Kings" was borrowed from the Persian kingdom. It was never assumed by Odenathus during his lifetime, so far as the records tell, and it was the nearest equivalent to Augustus that could have been found. It is specially significant and characteristic of the cunning spirit which governed the whole policy, that, while it was the custom in Palmyra to engrave a Greek version along with the Palmyrene, here the Greek version was omitted. It would seem that few or none of the Romans in Palmyra were able to read the Syriac characters. By the avoidance of Roman titles and the ostentatious use of native ones the queen was already appealing to her citizens in a secret language, and preparing them for a revolt that could not now be long delayed.

In the story of Zenobia's claims for herself after the death of her husband we see the same blend of the spirit of adventure with a cautious working for the

[1] Cooke, *North-Semitic Inscriptions*, 130.

long result. It is not clear whether she meant from the first to act merely for her son during his minority, but it is clear enough that she was determined to have as full a share of honour as she could safely claim. In Palmyra, indeed, the title which she adopted after her husband's death was *βασιλίσση* (great queen). That is the title which we have already found on the first milestone of the road to Homs.[1] In 271 those who erected the statue of Odenathus in the colonnade simultaneously erected one to Zenobia on a neighbouring column on the eastern side, and the titles are "the illustrious, the pious, *βασιλίσση*." This could offend no one; but the fact that her name and that of her son were engraved on milestones on the great Roman Road (and in some cases the letters are Syriac) was an implicit but daring indication of the direction in which her thoughts were moving. In remoter places she used no such caution. At Alexandria, where at this period all things appear to have been possible, coins were struck in her name bearing the title *Sebaste* (*Augusta*). But the most daring of all her memorials that have come down to us is that inscription which Renan found in 1871 on what bears the appearance of a milestone near the ancient Byblos. In this inscription Aurelian is mentioned with fullest honours, but Zenobia is coupled with him, and while he is called Sebastos (Augustus) she is Sebaste (Augusta).[2] It is an ominous

[1] Cf. p. 240.

[2] Le Bas-Waddington, 2611. In the spring of 271 A.D., after the news of a defeat of Aurelian in Northern Italy had reached Palmyra, coins were

and fateful conjunction. One turns back to the older story, and remembers that there is a station on the railway near Alexandria named Camp Cæsar—a memorial of the short-lived infatuation of the great Julius for Cleopatra, which Mr. Bernard Shaw has recently commemorated in so sprightly a fashion. But Aurelian was no sentimentalist, and she who thus boldly proposed to play Augusta to his Augustus was at least not lacking in courage.

But it is in the records of her son Vaballathus that we reach the limit of this daring and the end of the play. His name, Wahab Allath, means the Gift of Allath, a Syrian goddess apparently identified with Athene, since the Latin form of the name is Athenodorus. Whether or not the legend of the sons of Zenobia appearing in imperial purple in the amphitheatre be true, at least this son (and there is no really historic record of any other), assuming the position of his dead father in virtue of hereditary right, soon shewed that he understood that position in his mother's rather than in his father's meaning. Under Claudius he governed Egypt with the equivocal title of *βασιλεύς*, "the King," and it would appear that he did not strike any coins during the three years that followed his father's death. But in 269-270 A.D. his coins display the letters "V(ir) C(onsularis) R(omanorum) IM(perator) D(ux) Romanorum," in which the received meaning of Vir Consularis as the title of a subject is directly contra-

issued bearing the inscription, "Zenobia Augusta." (Stuart Jones, *Roman Empire*, 324.)

dicted. His coins, with their title Augustus, are sometimes laureate and sometimes adorned with rays about the head, these honours being sometimes given to the head of Aurelian and sometimes to his own. But in the year 270-271 he ceased to put the portrait of Aurelian on the reverse of his coins. Along with these facts we may place that of an inscription in Latin found near Burj-er-Rihan, of which only two words are decipherable — the words IMPERATORI ATHENODORO.[1] The gods are proverbially prone to irony in the affairs of mortals, but the goddess who gave to Zenobia the gift of Vaballathus must have been sardonic.[2]

In the year 270 A.D. Aurelian succeeded Claudius. He was a man risen from the ranks, a soldiers' emperor, and he had the faults of such men. He was subject to fits of passion, in which the indomitable will, that usually waited its time, burst forth in a fierce and sudden deed, whose violence he afterwards lamented. But in the main he was a man of self-restraint, discipline, and the plain common sense of the powerful towards the weak. Without susceptibility either to the charms or the dangers to which he was exposed, he cut his way through the three years of his life as Emperor in so straight a line, that one perceives

[1] Stuart Jones, *Roman Empire*, 324, *note*.

[2] Stuart Jones, in his *History of the Roman Empire*, finds evidence in the fact that coins struck in Antioch and Alexandria bore Aurelian's name on one face and Vaballathus' name on the other, for a convention between the powers which the troubles in Italy and the Illyrian Provinces forced him for the time being to concede. P. 319.

in him what seems like a revival of the older Roman character. Had he lived he might have done much to restore the Empire to its earlier ideals, though he had neither the practical genius of Julius nor the spacious magnificence of Augustus.

His attention was immediately turned to Egypt; and against Vaballathus, striking his daring coinage in Alexandria, there came another Probus, who regained what the admiral of that name had lost. The struggle was acute, and Alexandria (not for the first time nor the last) was all but annihilated before Egypt was reconquered. Vaballathus had retreated on Palmyra, and had there been at once proclaimed Emperor by his people. The desperate hour had struck, and Zenobia knew that all her fortunes and the great dream were immediately at stake. The loss of Egypt was more serious even than at first sight it appears. Her army, of which Palmyra itself could supply little more than the famous troop of archers, was infinitely composite, and many of the forces which composed it must have been but loosely attached to her cause, eager only to espouse the winning side. The attitude of Persia, too, was doubtful. The now aged Sapor might be counted on to help in a long-delayed vengeance on the ancient enemy, but he was not likely to forget his losses under Odenathus until Rome was already vanquished, and he could deal the final blow. Asia Minor had not yet been won for the projected Palmyrene Empire; and, in fact, Claudius had died too soon. Yet there was encouragement in the

remembrance of much of Rome's former history in the East. The desert, the plague, and the drought were Palmyra's surest allies.

It was late in 271 A.D. that Aurelian set out on his great undertaking. He met Zenobia and Zabdas, with their composite army, first at Antioch. He won the battle and followed the retreating Palmyrenes up the Orontes to Emesa, on which they had fallen back. Aurelian seems to have had no desire for extreme measures, and his pardoning of the conquered towns appears to indicate that he was willing to regard Zenobia's claims in the light of a misunderstanding of what had passed between Odenathus and Gallienus. In those days each Emperor had to reckon with the follies of his predecessors as well as with the situation they had bequeathed. He called upon Zenobia, before fighting her at Emesa, to submit, reminding her of the losses sustained already. Her answer was characteristic. "It was her Roman troops that had been defeated—the levies of Asia Minor trained by Roman generals: he had yet to reckon with her Orientals." That answer gives one of the most significant side-lights possible, both upon this campaign and upon the situation of Aurelian. In all the other wars which the Emperors fought in the East, they had led to battle troops of Eastern men to fight their fellow-Easterns. But here the Eastern armies of Rome seem to have been with the Queen. Aurelian's soldiers were from the Rhine and the Danube, and they were now to be matched with the cavalry of the Syrian desert.



MODERN HOMS.



THE LAKE OF HOMS, SCENE OF ZENOBIA'S LAST BATTLE.



The town of Homs stands, as we have already seen, on the edge of the plains that sink through rapid stages of increasing barrenness to the desert. Behind it, at the distance of but a few hours' march, rise the great mountain masses of Lebanon and Antilibanus, standing over against each other with the appearance of a gigantic gateway, the summits of the former range white with the winters' snows. Between the city and the mountains lies the Lake of Homs,[1] in which the young Orontes ends the first stage of its course. The lake is several miles in length, and beside it stand two of those hills which mark the sites of ancient Hittite cities. The plain is wide, and for long the battle swept to and fro upon it. Before the horsemen of the desert the Roman cavalry gave way and were scattered. But the irresistible force of the legions, that infantry which no brilliance of manœuvring could withstand, decided the issue and left the victory with the Romans.

Then followed one of the most memorable of the feats of the Roman army of imperial days. Aurelian had made his offer and it had been rejected. Now he meant to end the dream which had led to so much trouble. It must indeed be remembered that those seventy miles from Homs to Palmyra were not then barren as they are to-day. Even now there is not much more than half the distance that could be called absolutely desert. The remaining half, though now but sparsely cultivated or left wild to the growth

[1] A lake of fresh water and sweet for drinking.

of bent, may well have then been largely under the plough, and some of the stones we have described in a previous chapter[1] may be (as Mommsen says they are) "the remains of former villas and hamlets." But the thirty or forty miles that lie west of El Kerasi is now, and must then have been, utterly desert. A well here and there may have been lost, and the El Beda well lies only a mile or so off the road near the eastern end; but no remains of aqueducts or cisterns are to be seen along that route. For the light cavalry of the Eastern army there was comparatively little difficulty. The Arab armies had no commissariat, and they needed none. But how the heavy masses of the Roman horse and foot were got across that stretch of road, no man can tell. The light cavalry and archers of the enemy harassed them along every step of their march, yet the legions reached Palmyra. Behind them the road had to be guarded and kept open along its whole length, and a constant stream of supplies sent on to the besiegers. But a large part of Zenobia's army must now have disbanded and been scattered across the many countries whence they had been collected. The Palmyrenes shut themselves in within their walls, and in their well-provisioned city prepared to stand the siege. It is a brilliant picture and a pitiful one, that headlong dash of Zenobia and her bodyguard across the desert; and then, after certain days, when the road shook with the ceaseless tramp of men and beasts, and the sound was heard like thunder by Arabs

[1] Cf. p. 242.

in the distant fastnesses of Jerud, the flood of Romans slowly poured itself through the gates and down the defile upon the plain, like some stream of lava from a long-slumbering volcano wakened at last to overwhelm the city that shone white amidst its palm-trees below.

Had the Palmyrene genius been as excellent in fortification as it was in the building of colonnades and the carving of inscriptions, the city might have defied the West for ever. The hills of her entrance-pass throw round her western side a bulwark that might well have made her impregnable. But the Turkish castle, and probably the towers which guard the mouth of the high defile, belong to the later wars of the Saracens. Ancient Palmyra was content to be beautiful, and reckoned not upon the coming of days when she must be strong. Her walls must have been poor defences, if one may judge by what seem to be fragments of their foundations. The siege dragged on, until the hopelessness of maintaining it at last broke the spirit of the Queen. Escaping from the walls in disguise, she fled to throw herself upon the protection of that very Sapor whom her husband had routed ten years before. But the watchful Romans found out the ruse, and their cavalry caught her and dragged her back as she was in the very act of embarking on the Euphrates. Then comes the part of the tale that one would fain deny. Gibbon's picture is the darkest: "She ignominiously purchased life by the sacrifice of her fame and her friends."[1] But even Mommsen admits that

[1] *Decline and Fall*, chap. xi.

"Zenobia, after she had for years borne rule with masculine energy, did not now disdain . . . to throw the responsibility on her advisers, of whom not a few, including the celebrated scholar, Cassius Longinus, perished under the axe of the executioner."[1] Perhaps she had no alternative, and the conditions may have been like those which the Scottish Lords explained to Mary on Carberry Hill, that for Bothwell no terms were to be made, as they were determined to have his blood. But were there no asps in Palmyra, that she might have ended the drama as Cleopatra ended? Or was there still in that extraordinary spirit enough left of the colour and joy of life to make it worth the price they made her pay? Aurelian received in Rome a triumph which was reputed the most gorgeous that had ever been witnessed there. But it is said that there was one drop of bitterness in his cup of glory, for he had to defend himself against the sneer that he had been fighting with women in the East. Among the elephants and tigers and gladiators which made that triumph famous, there were also the plate and wardrobe of Zenobia. Was it to show what manner of woman he had been fighting that he had Zenobia led that day before his chariot in chains of gold to the Capitol, a spectacle for the Roman multitude? At any rate that is the last authentic glimpse we have of her, and the rest is left to rumour.

Until the end of the first siege and the capture of the Queen, Aurelian did his work with relentless

[1] *Roman Provinces*, book viii. p. 110.

thoroughness indeed, but apparently without passion. He spared the city, confident that its beauty could be no menace to the Empire now that its strength was broken. What plans for establishing the power of the West there he may have had, we do not know. He left a garrison in the city and withdrew the legions. But before his arrival in Rome, just after he had crossed the Hellespont, the news reached him that the Palmyrenes whom he had spared had treacherously risen, slain the garrison, and, under the rule of one Antiochus (or Apsacus, according to another authority), had set themselves to stir up a new revolt in Mesopotamia. Nothing could have been more fatuous than this, and Aurelian cannot be blamed for having believed that Palmyra would confess its game played out. But this enraged him. In furious anger he turned back and in an incredibly short time reached the doomed city. No resistance was attempted and no quarter was given. Everything that could be thrown down was demolished; the temple of the sun was stripped of its ornaments, which were placed in Aurelian's temple to the sun-god at Rome; the heavier ruins were left to the mercy of the earthquakes of later centuries, and the commonwealth of Palmyra was blotted out for ever.

Palmyra, little as Zenobia believed it, owed its existence to the choice of Rome, which during the Parthian troubles found this the most convenient of the trade-routes to the East. Now Rome decided to do without so dangerous a convenience, and the astonished East discovered that Palmyra could be done without.

Rome conducted her subsequent business with the East by other routes—the northern one by Aleppo when Armenia was quiet, and the more difficult Bostra route to the south when the other was too troublesome. In the words of Mommsen: "The short, meteor-like splendour of Palmyra and its princes was immediately followed by the desolation and silence which from that time down to the present day enwrap the miserable desert village and the ruins of its colonnades."[1] Thus, to quote the more sententious saying of Gibbon,[2] were "ages of prosperity sacrificed to a moment of glory."

[1] *Roman Provinces*, viii. 112.

[2] *Decline and Fall*, chap. xi.



COLONNADE, PALMYRA, WITH TURKISH CASTLE IN THE DISTANCE





CHAPTER XI

PALMYRA IN LIFE

A city whose history is written only in the stones that mark its site cannot be reconstructed without leaving many things to the imagination. Yet, when its inhabitants have developed so extraordinary a passion for inscriptions as that of the Palmyrenes, the emphasis and repetition of some things, the ignoring or touching with obvious lightness upon others, gives us perhaps a more accurate conception of the ancient life than any formal and conscious narrative could give. For, however conventional the engraving of memorial stones may become, it can hardly fail to give unexpected and suggestive reflections of the minds that thus expressed themselves. No one can walk among the ruins of Palmyra without asking himself what manner of persons they were who once lived there, nor need any one fail to form some general but interesting conclusions.

The climate may have somewhat changed, but it is not probable that this can have taken place to any considerable extent. The desert beyond the gates was

desert then as now, and the eastern plains can have undergone little or no alteration. The name Palmyra is deceptive, for the city lies near the northern limit within which the date-palm grows, and it must be remembered that in an oasis such as this, to the eyes of thirsty men accustomed to the desert, the poorest clump of palm-trees would appear divinely beautiful. In April we found the climate temperate and very pleasant, somewhat cold at nights when the wind was strong, and only once really hot in the day-time. Yet every one spoke of the terrific heats of summer, while only a month before our coming, there was word of two men who had been frozen to death there. Such a climate can hardly have allowed of any very luxuriant agriculture. But the wealth of the city was enormous, and the remains of aqueducts and reservoirs testify to a management of water-supply which may well have created some such green environs as those which still beautify Damascus.

The population was mainly of the Arab race, and many of the proper names are Arabic. Among the tribes and clans mentioned in the inscriptions are the Beni-Hatari, Beni-Meytha, Beni-Hélah, Beni-Migdath, and Beni-Hanéfi.[1] But from the earliest times, as was inevitable at the cross-roads of so many far-stretching lines of travel, they were a mixed race, representing many nationalities, from Persia to the far West. Rafāel is a name found in one inscription, while the Greek and Roman names are endless. The Roman influence was, of course, politically the predominant

[1] Le Bas-Waddington, 2578.

one ; and yet, so far as tone and manners went, the Greek was by far the stronger. It was the Greece of Roman imperial times that Palmyra knew and took to her heart, the Greece that brooded over the Roman Empire which had ruined Athens and Corinth, and changed Hellas from a nation into a spirit and an influence.[1] Many Jewish names are found, such as Sainon and Abba. At the dispersion of the Jews, after the siege of Jerusalem, many went to Palmyra, and they were a numerous and influential part of the community. There has been found no trace of Christianity among the monuments, except it be one or two very doubtful crosses scratched or cut upon votive altars to heathen gods.[2] Doubtless the city was not wholly destitute of Christians, but if they had been influential they would have left some memorial.

The language of Palmyra was a dialect of Western Aramaic (Palestinian). The technical words relating to government which are found in Palmyrene characters are mostly Greek, but there are also a few Latin words which were thus adopted. Usually the Romans allowed in their immediate territory only the use of Latin and Greek, but in Palmyra the native language was also

[1] "In the East the Romans were content to work through the Greek form of civilisation, and to act as the successors of Alexander. They did not Romanise ; they Hellenised." (W. T. Arnold, *Studies of Roman Imperialism*, p. 196.)

[2] The late Mr. F. T. Elworthy, in his volume on *The Evil Eye*, mentions the fact that the *crux ansata*, a pre-Christian phallic symbol found in many lands, appears also in sculptures from Palmyra now in the Louvre. P. 281.

permitted. It was, indeed, legal to use Aramaic for private intercourse in Syria generally, but in Palmyra it was used for public and official purposes to the end. It was customary to place a native version of an inscription beside the Greek version—the Greek usually, but not in every case, preceding the other. Evidently their native tongue was sweet to them, for Mommsen records the fact that "even in votive inscriptions which Palmyrenes set up to their native gods in Rome, and in tombs of Palmyrene soldiers that died in Africa and Britain, the Palmyrene rendering is added."

We cannot go with any fulness into the detail of the local government. It was a democratic commonwealth whose magistrates and council were recognised by Rome, although these are always, even in the Aramaic inscriptions, called by Greek names such as Archons or Dekaprotoi. We have already seen how the imperial power acknowledged, along with these, a *ras* or head-man, who was virtually the native prince. The use of the native language for official purposes shows how unique and peculiar a position the city enjoyed among Roman dependent cities. Mommsen mentions a striking instance of this in the fact that while the basis upon which time was reckoned was the Roman one, yet the names of the months were not Macedonian, but the ancient names which had been used in Syrian vernacular from the time of the Assyrian conquest. This special position appears also in the arrangements made for the collection of customs. Palmyra lay within the line of the imperial customs,

which were levied along the Euphrates frontier. Yet the city was constituted a special district which farmed customs upon imports and exports, not for Rome's benefit, but for its own. Very probably compensation may have been claimed for this in the form of some general impost to the Imperial Treasury, but as Mommsen remarks, "the indolence of Roman administration was stronger than its fiscal zeal," and it would certainly have been a troublesome business to extract the regular dues from a nation so keenly alive to the value of money and so devoted to commerce as this.

The Palmyrene native coinage was only in small money values. The coins are of terra-cotta, and on some of them figures can be distinguished which may have been those of Odenathus and Zenobia. For larger sums, the Greek and Roman coinage was used, impressed with the imperial effigy. The silver unit universally used in the East was the Attic drachm, which was practically equivalent to the Roman denarius, or about $9\frac{1}{2}$d. in our money. At this period the denarius was equal to four sestertii or sixteen asses, the assarion representing (though not exactly equivalent) another form of ass, whose value is stated to be $\frac{1}{24}$th of a denarius.

Palmyra literally "existed for commerce." Her grandees were merchant princes, and the chief honours in her inscriptions are given to men designated as "master of the caravan" or "chief of the market." These were the citizens selected to fill the most important municipal and imperial posts. Besides the

occupations supplied by transport and sales, the two leading employments seem to have been those of stone-workers and workers in the precious metals. Both of these trades were largely directed and carried on by Greek artists, and both must have been extensive. Such masses of dressed stone must have given employment to a vast army of workmen, from the quarrymen who first hewed the limestone to the sculptors whose chisel gave to the blocks of the finished edifice their last lines and curves. Among the many memorials of such workmen, it is not a little pathetic to read on the back of the pillar of Zebeidas, the inscription of one Diogenes, a contractor who "repaired the whole roof of the temple and the colonnade, which had been destroyed many years before."[1] That was in 327 A.D., fifty-five years after Aurelian's revenge. That the goldsmiths and silversmiths were a flourishing part of the community is proved by the fact that it was they who gifted so important a statue as that of Septimius Odenathus already referred to on p. 258. From that inscription we learn that they were united in a guild, or brotherhood ; and it is interesting to find, from the fragment of a broken marble tablet of the third century, that there was then a *συνοδια*, or caravan emporium of Palmyrene merchants, established at Denderah.[2]

It has been claimed that the great markets of the world exist only in Asia ; and so keen is the trading instinct to this day in Syrians, that it is said that when

[1] Le Bas-Waddington, 2591.

[2] Clermont-Ganneau, *Répertoire d'Epigraphie Semitique.*

special caravans are expected, the Damascus dealers sleep on their counters to be ready for their arrival. Such a city might well be supposed to have lost all its real lordliness of heart, and (in spite of the characteristic instinct of trade in the East) even much of its Oriental nature, coming nearer to the likeness of a modern commercial city of the West. The combination of royal splendours with successful trade is rarely a happy one, and Adam Smith had much history behind his dictum that the trader should not be sovereign. Yet, so far as romance is concerned at least, it would be difficult to imagine circumstances more favourable to the combination than those of Palmyra. That Tyrian trader, who "undid his corded bales" on the shores of Britain, is not a more striking figure, nor more tempting to the imagination, than the merchant of the desert caravan. The wistfulness with which one watches the train of camels dwindling in the Eastern distance is full of the sense of dangers suggested rather than expressible. The risk of illness or of accident that will fill one more of the lonely wayside graves; the forethought and anxious care that must be spent upon the daily supplies of food and water; the chance of camels staggering to their own destruction or getting out of hand, drunk with poisonous herbs; the madness that may come to men who have heard too sweetly and too long in their minds the plash of fountains behind them or the sound of flowing waters in front; sand-storms that will be followed up by the vultures and whose monument

will be the whitening bones of camels and of men,— these are but some of the elements of the romance of the caravan. For soldiers must go to guard this wandering wealth from robbers, and even now their defence is by no means always successful. Nay, even politics are involved, and desert politics are apt to lead to speedier and more drastic settlements than those tardy and bloodless ones to which diplomacy has accustomed us of the West. There are several extant inscriptions, recording caravan journeys to the city of Vologasias, near the site of ancient Babylon. This city was founded by Vologasus I. of Parthia shortly after the death of Tiberius. Tiberius, even in the days of his decay, had cast his shadow far across the East. But when he was gone, Armenia fell back to the Parthians, and the whole of Rome's work beyond Euphrates had to be done again. Just then the wise Vologasus founded the city that bore his name, at a point whence goods carried to it across the desert could be sent by river to Charax, the great emporium of the Persian Gulf. From the first his object was to divert the Palmyrene caravans to his new city, and two centuries later we find no less a man than Worod, the deputy of Odenathus, successfully engineering a Palmyrene caravan to Vologasias.

The conductors of caravans had need, therefore, to be responsible men, at once brave and wise beyond their fellows. Those who are honoured with statues are obviously men of importance, and their pillars stand alongside of those of the royal personages of Palmyra

in the Colonnade, with lists of ancestors as proudly enumerated as theirs. A typical and interesting inscription is that of one "Jaddaios Thaima the son of Mokimos the son of Gabba, who was caravan leader of the merchants, and who travelled with them from Vologasias, and ever brought relief to them."[1] The reasons given for the high honour of a memorial of this sort are sometimes general — "because he was well pleasing" to the merchants he convoyed. But often they are particular and very practical—"because he defrayed their expenses at his own cost." This was evidently and naturally a service highly appreciated; and well it might be, for in the case of the caravan superintended by Taim-arsu in 193 A.D., from Palmyra to Karak, the cost was no less than 300 denarii of gold, and that, too, in the ancient currency which had the heavier weight.[2]

One cannot but feel some curiosity to learn what it was that filled those bales, swinging so far upon the backs of camels; and fortunately the longest and by far the most detailed of all the inscriptions supplies us with this information. This is the famous Tariff Inscription, bearing the date 137 A.D., which was discovered in 1882 by Prince Abamelek Lazarew. It is given in full by Cooke in his *North-Semitic Inscriptions*. Palmyra farmed its own taxes, and the Gospel narratives have familiarised us with the abuses to which such tax-farming led, and the reputation which

[1] Sterrett, in *Wolfe's Expedition to Asia Minor*, vol. iii. No. 641.

[2] Cooke, *North-Semitic Inscriptions*, 115.

the publicans had acquired for rapacity and dishonesty. Nothing furnished a more fruitful source of disputes than the absence of any fixed scheme of rates, and by the promulgation of the tariff tables set down in this inscription, "we have a rare instance of an attempt to deal with abuses by cancelling the loose system of taxation 'by custom,' and specifying fixed rates in detail."[1] A strange contrast this to the present administration of the Turkish Empire, where each pasha is fighting for his own hand, and the poor man is taxed to the bone for every means of livelihood, until he gives up in despair the miserable struggle, and all industry faints and dies, leaving only starved and accursed idleness. As to the original source of the Palmyrene tariff tables, we learn that "The Senate promulgates this decree on its own account, without reference to Rome; the earlier Tariff, however, [and both texts are included in the inscription] of which this is only a readjustment, was in all essentials drawn up by the Roman authorities."[2]

In the formal preamble we have a very striking piece of legal writing. It is the work of worthy men, magistrates who took their responsibilities seriously and were anxious rightly to fulfil them. They are displeased because of the unbecoming incidents that have arisen, and they are determined that their city's business shall be conducted with order and fairness

[1] Cf. Tacitus, *Ann.* xiii. 50. 51, for a somewhat similar, though by no means so thorough attempt to deal with the same evil in Nero's reign.

[2] Cooke, *sub loco.*

for the future. The preamble reads as follows:—"Whereas in former times, by the law of taxation, many goods liable to taxation were not specified, but taxes were levied on them by custom, according to what was written in the contract of the tax-collector, and he was in the habit of making levies by law and custom, and on this account many times about these matters disputes arose between the merchants and the tax-collectors—It seemed good to the Council of these Archons and to the Ten that they should make known what was not specified in the law, and (that) it should be written down in the new document of contract, and that there should be written down for each article its tax which is by custom and what they have established with the contractor, and they have written it down together with the former law, on the stele which is in front of the Temple of Rahaseire;—And that it be made the concern of the Archons who shall be in office at any time, and of the Ten and of the Syndics, that the contractor do not demand any further levy from any man." Then follow the details of taxation for import and export, according to camel, donkey, or waggon load. Among the articles specified are:—Dry-goods, salted fish, wheat, straw, costus-roots, pine-cones, herbs, salt; fine oil for ointment and common oil, conveyed in flask or in skin; wine, skins of fat; slaughtered animals for meat, and flocks of lambs; ordinary skins, purple fleeces and wool; images of bronze and statues; slaves, among whom the "veteran" slaves are taxed but half the rate, and slave-girls

cheapest of all. The pine-cones, which are taxed as dry-goods, similarly to nuts and almonds, were doubtless used, as they still are in Syria, for food. The size of camel-load is specified as four goat-skins of oil and such goods; for the camels themselves, whether laden or empty, an additional charge of one denarius was levied. The heaviest tax recorded is upon sweet oil in flask, which pays 25d. per camel-load. Among the lowest is that upon salt, which pays but one ass per modius. This at first sight is surprising, considering the preciousness of the estimation in which salt is held among the Arabs. But from the height of the Great Temple, looking eastward, there is a strip of white that might easily be mistaken for mirage. That is the line of the salt-lakes, ever evaporating, and making salt a cheap commodity there.[1] Yet, lest any enterprising person should be tempted to take advantage of the ignorance of a stranger, there is on the stele a note to the effect that salt is to be sold in the public market, and that one ass per modius is its price. Further, the ways of publicans being ever liable to crookedness, it is enacted that the tax-collector shall accept small change for sums under a denarius. And there are certain articles upon which no tax at all is to be levied. Victuals (export or import) passing between Palmyra and the neighbouring villages are free. And

[1] Forder, in his account of his adventurous journey to Jowf, describes in interesting detail the gathering of salt at Ithera in the desert, and gives the price of it at 1s. 3d. per camel-load at the brine springs. (*With the Arabs in Tent and Town*, pp. 114, 172, 173.)

so are the bodies of old and sick animals which could not be brought to the slaughter-house. It may be feared that these offered the one apparent loophole to rogues wishing to do business without paying toll. The writer has encountered a camel-load of such carcases on its way to villages south of Damascus, where it would be sold as food to the rustics. There is one other exception to the tax which must have been made for the earlier form of the enactment. It is expressly mentioned that Cæsar is exempt—*i.e.* Germanicus, the nephew and heir of Tiberius, who was sent in 17 A.D. on a special mission to the East.

Besides these taxes on goods entering and leaving the city, there are certain dues levied upon its trade. A tax, for example, varied according to circumstances, is levied upon clothiers bartering within the city, and for every shop and general store there is a monthly charge of one denarius. But the most notable of all the items is a charge of 800 denarii "for the use of the two wells in the city." It is not stated how many persons are included in this charge, nor for how long they may use the waters. In any case it is a high price, equal to over £31 stg. Pliny calls Palmyra "a city noble in situation, in wealth, in sunshine and pleasant waters." Palmyra knew all that, and valued her chief asset highly, as it deserved. So, in the ancient days, there flowed from that hill-side of hers a stream not of water only but of gold; and while strangers were paying so heavily for their water, there was no reason why citizens should pay more than a denarius

a month for their shops. Nor would the strangers grudge it, as the hot and dusty caravans came in to the oasis. Even now not infrequently men are drowned through over-eagerly plunging into the dark cave of the waters. For the most part, the waters of the desert are in deep wells, accessible only with difficulty. Most of the desert quarrelling is now, as it was in Abraham's time, on account of water-springs, and not infrequently a man may own a well that lies in the middle of another man's field. It is no wonder if water, even in the smallest quantities, is precious in that thirsty land. Men have even been known to live for five days on water extracted from their slaughtered camels. To such men no price would seem high for the great and blessed refreshment of that cave, whose memory has doubtless haunted the last torturing consciousness of many a perishing traveller.[1]

Besides trade, the chief occupations of the Palmyrenes were fighting and building, in both which pursuits they made a famous name among the mighty workers of antiquity. Their fighting powers must, as we have already seen, have been by no means to be despised. The characteristic weapon, in which they were specially skilful, was the bow and arrow. It is probable that, as among the Parthians, the archers were cavalry soldiers. If we are to believe the Talmud, we must credit Palmyra with an enormous army, for it is there stated that 80,000 Palmyrene archers were present at the overthrow of the first temple of Jerusalem, and

[1] Cf. Forder, *With the Arabs in Tent and Town*, pp. 138, 159, 219-221.

8000 at the overthrow of the second.[1] There is evidence also of a contingent of these archers serving in the Roman army in Africa. There are no traces of their weapons on any monument yet discovered in the city, but there is one bust of a young man holding a rod in his right hand and the hilt of a dagger in his left. Behind his shoulder is represented the front part of a horse, covered with a cuirass. This man—his name was Jaru, son of Maliku, son of Jaddai—probably belonged to a regiment of heavy cavalry.[2] But there is a funeral inscription in memory of one Rubat, a Palmyrene archer "of the century of Maximus," who died at the age of forty-five.[3] And in the Museum of Constantinople there is the following Latin epitaph: "Consecrated to the gods of the dead. Agrippa, son of Themus, Palmyra, who was a centurion of the third Syriac cohort of the Thracians, and was further transferred to the first cohort of the Chalcidenes, by order of the Emperor, commanded the Palmyrene archers for ten years. He lived for 55 years, having served in all 33 years. Erected by his freedman and steward."[4]

But it is as builders that the people of Palmyra have by far the greatest claim on our interest. The period was that during which Greeks were doing the artistry of the Roman world. Money was plentiful, as it happened, in the hands of those who were eager to spend it on architecture of many kinds. So there

[1] Cooke, *North-Semitic Inscriptions*, 146.
[2] *Ibid.* 146.
[3] *Répertoire*, 348.
[4] *Ibid.* 52.

arose, in various regions of the Empire, cities and temples bearing a strong resemblance to one another. Palmyra, Baalbek in Coelesyria, Jerash beyond the Jordan, and much similar work along the African shore of the Mediterranean, are unmistakably the products of the same time. It was, so far as invention went, a barren period. The wonder and the whole-heartedness of ancient Greece were gone. Then Art had sprung to the cry of freedom, and had felt the quickening power of a nation's search for truth and beauty alike in thought and conduct. Now Greece was conquered and her freedom was a mere tradition ; scepticism had robbed men of any vital or enthusiastic belief, and the defiling streams of Eastern licentiousness had poured themselves into the life of the Empire, fouling its ancient ideals of virtue with effeminate indulgence. In a word, it was a decadent time, from which alike the purity and the bloom of former days were gone. Yet the knowledge was there, and a lingering, though often debased conception of beauty and love of it. Art then was like Andrea del Sarto in the poem :—

> I do what many dream of all their lives
> —Dream ? strive to do, and agonise to do,
> And fail in doing. . . . I am judged.
> There burns a truer light of God in them,
> In their vexed beating stuffed and stopped-up brain,
> Heart, or whate'er else, than goes on to prompt
> This low-pulsed forthright craftsman's hand of mine.

No new style was possible in such a time. It had not vitality enough to express itself in anything

original, nor clearness of vision to see anything worthy of such expression. It could but reproduce the ancient forms, and when it longed for some line along which to differ from the past and produce something of its own, the only suggestion that came to it was one derived from the strength and thoroughness of the Roman spirit. The result was that the outlet was found in increase of size and of structure and elaboration of ornament.

It has been said that the taste for extravagant dimensions destroyed style in architecture,[1] and much has been spoken bitterly against the colossal buildings of this time. Perhaps too much has been said of this sort, and it might have occurred to such critics that when men's buildings have stood against all comers for two thousand years, it is easier to find fault with their work than to produce anything as worthy. There is no reason why great size should in any respect do harm to architectural style, if the proportions be kept acçurate, and if the site of the building offer a sufficiently distant view of it. Now these conditions have both been fulfilled, in Palmyra and Baalbek. The one overlooks a valley six miles broad, and commands the view across its whole extent. The other can be seen as a whole only from the heights above it, sufficiently distant to take away any sense of extravagance of size in the buildings, yet near enough to show them off almost in detail. In either case it would be difficult to find any fault in the proportion,

[1] Coventry Patmore, *Dawn of Art*, p. 109.

for if Palmyra's ruins in some places present a slightly squat and heavy appearance, as in the case of the temple of the king's mother, it must be remembered that the elevations were formerly greater than they are to-day, owing to the drift of sand.

As to their structure, what builder to-day could, by any perfection of skill now known, lay blocks like those of Baalbek, so exactly that the blade of a knife could not be introduced between them along their whole length? If the Palmyrene ruins that have survived so many shocks of earthquake cannot show anything that quite equals that perfection, they certainly leave little to be asked for in the way of structural excellence. The Great Arch at the end of the colonnade, shaken asunder by earthquake, is still tied firm by its keystone that has simply slipped down a little way, and fitted the lower part of the angle as perfectly as it fitted its original place. The fragments of the walls of the Serai (or Senate-house) stand massive and intact still as in the days when they rang to Zenobia's defiance of Rome. Even where a structure is planned for its purely artistic effect, it is well planned. The almost invisible bend in the colonnade relieves and exhibits it, just as the invisible curve of the steps of the Parthenon or the leaning chancel of Gothic cathedrals do for these. The workmanship, both structural and decorative, appears to have been honest and thorough to the last degree. The roof of the peristyle of the Baalbek Temple of Bacchus stood at the height of sixty feet from the ground, so that it would have been impossible for



VINE-PATTERN CARVINGS ON FALLEN BLOCKS, PALMYRA.



STONE DOOR, PALMYRA.



any one to detect a flaw. Much of that sculptured roof has been brought down by earthquake, and there is no carelessness, nor lack of conscientious finish, to be found in any of it. The same thing is true of Palmyra, and some of the most perfectly executed examples of the carving are to be found on fragments of pediments or friezes whose former elevation might have covered a multitude of defects. It is probably safe to say that upon the greater buildings of Palmyra no sham work has been found.

As to the carving and sculpture, there is much again that can be said on both sides. Coventry Patmore[1] has beautifully and truly shewn that all architecture is the more or less unconscious expression of the character and ideals of the builders. The Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian styles have been quoted by another keen observer in illustration of this fact, as representing respectively the spirit of Aeschylus, of Sophokles, and of Euripides. The three more or less accurately correspond to the threefold division of human thought and ideal, whose extremes are Hebraism and Hellenism in the popular understanding of these terms, while the third represents the rational compromise between form and matter, beauty and strength, decoration and structure.

The architectural art of the third century was still in the hands of Greeks. Scattered throughout the cities of the Roman Empire, Roman citizens of Greek blood, they created that new architecture which was

[1] *Architectural Styles.*

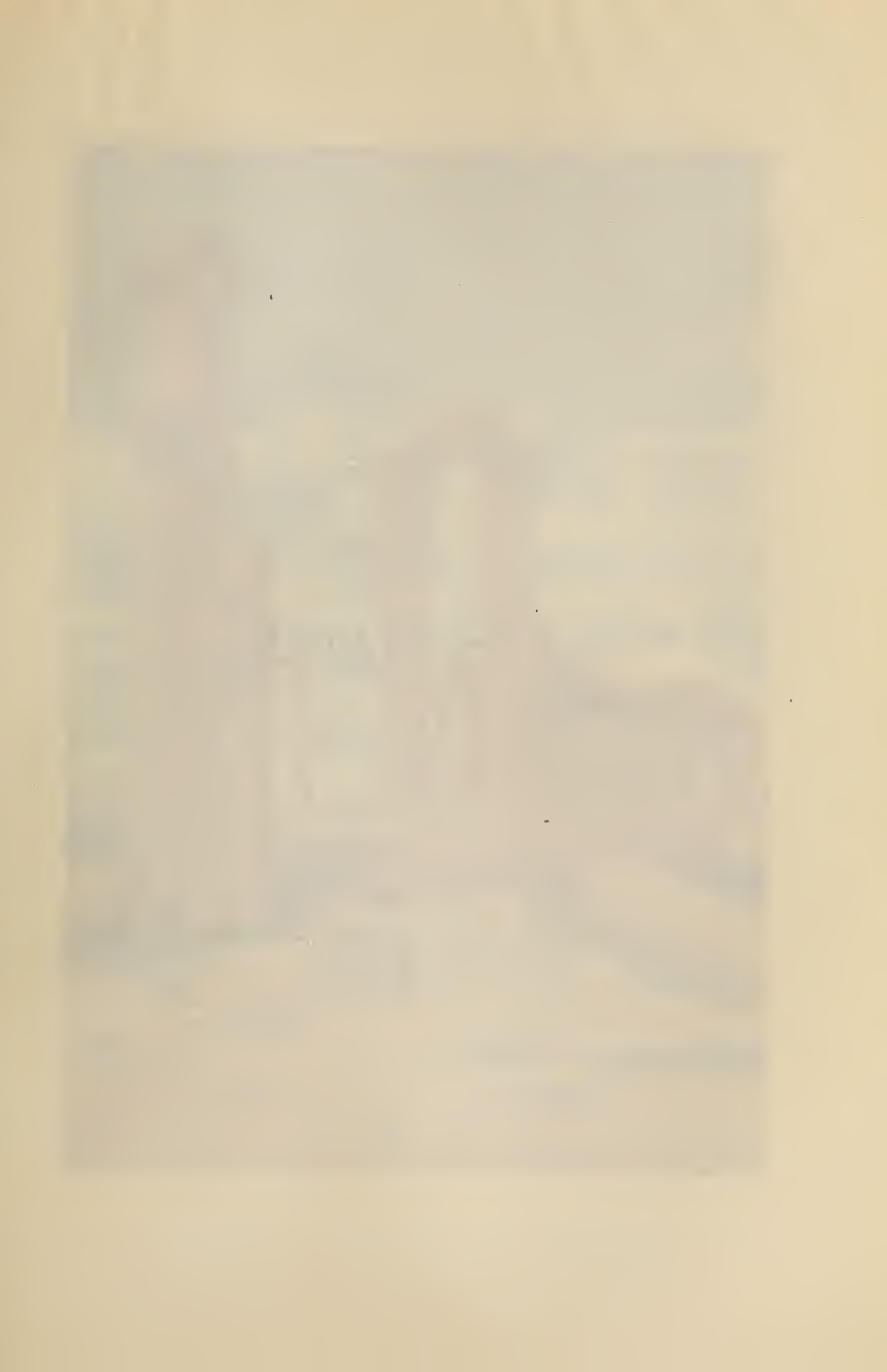
no real creation. Greek in structure and in style, Roman in mass and size and strength, Oriental in spirit, it tells the history of the age more eloquently than it has ever been told by historians. Palmyra rose under the chisels, or at least under the instruction, of such late Greeks. But they had caught the spirit of the city; and, besides the features which Palmyra exhibited in common with all the world of that time, there are certain distinctive and very instructive peculiarities which are not found elsewhere. There is, indeed, some very chaste and good work among the ruins. The façade of the temple in which the colonnade terminates at its western end is pure and severe. The slabs of stone found near that temple, show a frieze wonderfully free from the general elaboration. The same praise may be given to the decoration of the Serai. But it is far otherwise with the greater part of the carved work. Needless to say, the style is everywhere Corinthian, but it is Corinthian like that of Baalbek, elaborated so much that the acanthus leaf here frequently runs off into fanciful designs of leaves with extremely delicate and sharp spikes. The huge and massive stone doors, which, swinging on their great hinges that were part of the same block, might have had a very impressive effect. But they are cut into deeper and deeper panels, one within the other, until the central one is little more than a slit. The result is that with all their weight and mass they give the impression of restlessness, and lose anything they might otherwise have had of dignity.

And that is typical of the whole. The craftsmanship is undeniably beautiful and exquisitely skilful ; but it is the work of artizans, lacking in the delicate and subtle qualities of the artist's work. The decoration is voluptuously florid and unrestrained. Everything is expressed, nothing suggested. Without that reticence which quickens the imagination, this architecture with its tremendous scale and its excess of ornament is wanting in unity of character and meaning, and impresses one often as but a costly juxtaposition of severity and licentiousness.

The statues and busts, most of which are life-size or smaller, are of all degrees of merit and demerit. Some of them are extraordinarily poor, with not even accuracy, to say nothing of expression, in the chiselling even of the head and face, while the folds of cloth give the impression of cast-iron rather than of drapery. Others again, especially those of women, are most delicate, with soft and clinging draperies, and eyes and lips that speak still, after so long a time, both of pride and gentleness. In the Mudir's house there is a woman's head, poised sideways, in which the folding flesh of the inner curves of the neck is a wonderfully delicate and life-like piece of work ; and there is also a curious carving of a falcon grasping a hen in its claws, which, in its own way, is a quite remarkable achievement. Yet even in the finest work there is often some jarring touch. A gigantic pair of ear-rings, cut inch-deep in the limestone with chisels perfectly controlled, or head-dresses whose detail of jewel-work

keeps the eye from looking upon the face of the statue, are the rule rather than the exception. In the relievos, the background is often filled in with palm branches or similar ornamental designs. These, however, seem to have been rather carelessly executed, and there is nothing of this kind which comes anywhere within sight of the cleverness and delicacy of the work at the Bacchus temple of Baalbek.

These statues are one of the distinctive features of Palmyrene work. Another is their brackets. Not Herod the Great himself, whose rage for columns was proverbial, can have outdone the Palmyrene delight in them. Not the colonnade only, but cross streets cutting it at right angles, were lined with columns. They stood in the courts of houses and the porticos of temples. At and around the Great Temple of the Sun they seem to have resembled a grove of palm-trees thickly planted. These pillars—florid Corinthian in every case—were finely shaped and proportioned, and the most carping critic could not deny their beauty, and indeed grandeur. At the end of the colonnade next the Great Arch there were placed two monoliths of Egyptian granite, 29 feet in height, whose rich purple showed off the splendour of the white and orange limestone among which they stood. The monoliths, of course, rose smooth from base to capital. But, with the possible exception of one or two in the Temple of the Sun, they are the only pillars of which this is true. The rest—and there were many hundreds of them—are not monoliths, but



FALLEN MONOLITH, PALMYRA





are built up in large drums of stone some four or five feet each in length. But about two-thirds of their length up from the ground a drum is inserted only a foot or so long, which projects in a bracket standing well out from the pillar. In some cases, at the angle of two streets, two brackets project at right angles from the same drum of the column. Now that these brackets stand empty, the level line of their projections which catches the eye as one looks along the intact part of the colonnade, suggests corbels from which an arched roof might have sprung. But that was not their use. They were simply brackets for busts or statues of citizens to stand on. Every pillar has its one or more brackets, and in many cases honorary inscriptions were cut in the stone below them, in letters of Greek and Palmyrene, some of these being still perfectly legible and clear. Even in the pillars at the temples this practice was carried out, the inscription telling by whom, and to whose honour, the column was erected. One column, of date 129 A.D., from which the names are now erased, tells that these nameless ones set up "six pillars, and their beams and their coverings, at their own expense." It was in this way that the colonnade was evolved, pillar after pillar being built at the expense of individual citizens, or by the council and city, in honour of their fellow-citizens or the gods, but always also commemorating the donor by name. Now and again the artist catches the infection of fame, and adds a note such as "Remembered be Yarhai the sculptor."

No doubt there is a kindly side to all this. The city is steeped in large-hearted praise and appreciation of one citizen by another. A typical reason for the honour is "Lovers of their city and fearers of the gods, because they were well-pleasing to them in everything whatsoever." There are not many men in any generation who deserve so absolute a memorial, or whose memory would bear it. And yet such testimonials, which are very frequent, prove that these grandees of Palmyra must have been pleasant neighbours to live among.

Even this amount of praise, however, must be given with a certain reserve. There is often word of a gift, for which the statue and pillar are an acknowledgment. Thus the council and people in 131 A.D. erects one such memorial to Male Agrippa, because "when the divine Hadrian came here, he gave oil to the people and the equerries and to the strangers who came with him."[1] Julius Aurelius Ogga receives his pillar in 254 A.D. for a gift to the council of 10,000 drachms.[2] This inscription and many others might suggest to the cynically minded that every pillar had its price, and could be purchased by a gift of about £400, by those who counted it worth the sum. Nay, further, there is one inscription of 242-3 A.D. which commemorates one Julius Aurelius Zabd-ila, the son of Maliku, as a man who, among other virtues, "was chief of the market, and spent money in a most generous manner; and he lived his life peaceably [or 'purely,' the word being

[1] Vog. 16. [2] Vog. 17.

doubtful]."[1] This Julius is supposed, for reasons apparently convincing, to be that Arabian who instigated the murder of the third Gordian, and succeeded him as Emperor. Of course every man has his own idea of how to lead a pure and peaceable life, but it is just possible that this inscription, at least, may have provoked a smile among the intimates of Julius.

Be that, however, as it may, the whole system was inexcusable. From the point of view of art, the brackets were an outrage on the columns, such as could be perpetrated only by the most bourgeois vulgarity and lack of intelligence. From the point of view of religion, such brackets and statues, intruding themselves upon the pillars of the temple porticos, were a desecration. Neither the art nor the worship which thus lent themselves to self-advertising men, can escape the charge of unreality. And then, the advertising is so extravagantly overdone. Everybody seems to have a statue, and everybody's cousins and his aunts. The rage for notoriety to which it all bears witness, must have defeated the very object it sought to gain. Matthew Arnold has wisely said that "Excellence is not common and abundant. . . . Whoever talks of excellence as common and abundant is on the way to lose all standard of excellence."[2]

If among the architects, who went up to the heights of an evening to see the growing beauty of the colonnade as its building advanced, there was one man left who had not sold his soul to vanity, he must

[1] Vog. 15.

[2] *Essays in Criticism*, ii. 58.

have felt that beauty he was creating marred and caricatured with self-consciousness. You could never get rid of these pushing and crowding citizens, so eager for commemoration. The fault of Palmyrene architecture, and the reason for its falling short of real greatness, is no surface blemish, but a hopeless and radical defect. It is unlit by the lamp of sacrifice, and without that light, art, like life itself, can never attain to greatness. Self is never for an instant forgotten, but he that in this fashion keepeth his life shall lose it. The names of countless Palmyrenes were remembered, and many of them are remembered still ; but that very fact, thrusting its crowd of nobodies upon the future, has proved but too plainly how little worth remembering they were, all but a very few.

It has been supposed that the Palmyrenes were a people steeped in luxury and utterly debauched and sensual. The very site of the city, which might so easily have stood in strength upon the impregnable heights, shows it to have been a City of the Plain by choice and disposition. No doubt, as wealth increased with a swiftness which must have amazed even those to whom it came, much effeminacy and vicious luxury must have come with it. Yet, in justice to the Palmyrenes, it must be said that there is singularly little trace of all this. The famous colonnade of Samaria is poor compared with that of Palmyra, but in the hill-side there are the remains of two amphitheatres. Similar remains are to be found at Gadara, Jerash, and many other places in Hauran, whose ruins



TORSO OF THE GOD OF WINE, PALMYRA.



CARVING ON ROOF OF PERISTYLE, TEMPLE OF BACCHUS, BAALBEK.



are of much the same workmanship as those of Palmyra, and date from the same period. There must have been a theatre and hippodrome. Nowhere in the world was there a better opportunity for camel- and horse-racing than there; and he who has once felt the thrill of excitement at such races in the East will find it difficult to believe that men so expert in the management of swift beasts could have resisted the temptation which Rome had offered lavishly to the world. The camel-race alone is a thing to remember for a lifetime—its rush and fury, the colour of garments and housings, the incredible swiftness of the beasts and the savage cries of the men. Yet no vestige of anything that can be identified as a place of amusement has been found in Palmyra. Elsewhere, the most splendid of the ruins usually include baths, theatre, or hippodrome. Here they are serai, temples, colonnades, and tombs. There is, indeed, one spot near the Serai where a curve of foundation buildings has suggested the site of a hippodrome. But the space is so small that it is difficult to accept the identification, and if it be accepted it would certainly prove the Palmyrenes to have had but little keenness for sport. It is hard to part with so gorgeous a scene as that which Ware describes[1] in his book on Zenobia—of the vast multitude assembled in the amphitheatre, and the appearance in Imperial purple of Zenobia's sons—but his conceptions of the size and spaciousness of the city are curiously exaggerated.[2]

[1] Cf. p. 262.

[2] To quote but one instance, he gives the distance from the Sun-temple

The whole life of Palmyra must have crowded itself into an area of not much more than about a mile square, and this can have left but little room for the luxurious splendours of amusement which have been attributed to it. Nor have any ruins as yet been discovered on the surrounding plain which would indicate that such buildings had been erected outside the walls.

As to the common vices of the time, the wine of Palmyra was famous as a heady and rich vintage. The tariff-table classes wine with wheat and straw, charging as duty on it only one denarius per camel-load, which may perhaps indicate its cheapness and abundance. The Mudir of Palmyra has in his house a remarkable torso of the god of wine—no doubt the Baal identified with Bacchus, who presided over vine-culture—and four of his worshippers, a woman sitting and three men standing behind him. Their features are somewhat damaged, but the general expression and pose have nothing in them to suggest excess or revelry. The draperies of the god are rich with embroidery, whose pattern is the vine leaf and cluster of grapes. His attitude is that of one strong and alert. He holds in his hand a small two-handled cup. In the rich ornamentation of friezes and pediments there is much of the vine leaf and cluster design, but there is nothing to indicate that this was regarded as more than a characteristic article of use and of traffic ; indeed, as

to the colonnade arch as half a Roman mile. As a matter of fact the distance is only the breadth of the market-place—a space of 165 yards.

we shall see, the grape-cluster is frequently found in the hand of tomb-statues, which seems to indicate a national rather than a voluptuous significance. In the temple of Bacchus in Baalbek there is a wonderfully vivid set of large panels in relief carving, representing a dance of Bacchantes, whose limbs and drapery alike show the wild *abandon* of the cult. Nothing could possibly be in stronger contrast to that, than this quite commonplace relief, with its business-like god and its row of eminently respectable worshippers.

Yet there are indications of another side to this question. In 1900 two altars were discovered by Littman a short distance to the east of the great Temple of the Sun, dedicated by a Nabatean cavalry soldier to She'a-Algûm [or Châi'al-Qaum], "the good and bountiful god who drinks not wine" [or, perhaps, "who does not allow his worshippers to drink wine"]. The name of this deity means "the god who accompanies the people," and thus distinguishes him as the special deity of the caravan.[1] The prohibition of wine-drinking by the god of the caravan may indicate a wise precaution against obvious dangers on the march. But it is probably rather a protest against the dissolute cult which was going to such lengths in the East at that time. The ground of such protest was national rather than moral. It was the protest of the hardier race of men against encroaching luxury and softness. Before Mohammed there were among the Arabs those who abstained on like grounds from all intoxicants; and

[1] Cooke, *North-Semitic Inscriptions*, 140.

the vows of the Rechabites recorded in the Old Testament were due to similar motives.[1] The date of this altar is 132 A.D., and it is more than likely that it represented at least one section of Palmyrene sentiment.

As to other forms of sensual indulgence, it must be acknowledged that there is singularly little memorial, and that in this respect Palmyra contrasts strongly with the ruins of many ancient cities. Of course Baal-worship involved much sensuality, and doubtless this was the case here as elsewhere. There is a pillar, erected to one Astali by the council in 140 A.D., on which it is recorded that this Astali set up consecrated things to Athar-'atheh,[2] and to other deities, of which one is Malak-bel.[3] Such worship in Palmyra would be very much what it was elsewhere. The tariff-list of taxable commodities seems to point to a society in which vice was as excessively cheap as water was dear. Yet there is no record of any such magnificence in vice, nor of the extravagant pomp and circumstance

[1] W. Robertson Smith, *Prophets of Israel*, pp. 84, 388.

[2] Cooke, *North-Semitic Inscriptions*, 112.

[3] Cooke, in an instructive note, informs us that "This Malak-bel is one of the forms of sun-god, often associated with 'Agli-bol, the moon goddess. Here he is associated with Athar-'atheh (Ατεργατης), the great goddess of the Arameans, whose chief Syrian centres were in Hierapolis and Damascus. The first part of the name identifies her with Atar-of-the-heavens, whom at least one tribe of the North Arabians worshipped. The second name, Atheh, is probably the same as Attis, a Phrygian god identified with Adonis. The composite name indicates the union between the young foreign god and the Syrian goddess, and Herodotus was probably right in recognising in her the Greek Αφροδιτη ουρανια."

with which in Rome, and in almost every larger city of that time, it was the fashion to clothe it.

Much of all this is, as will have been observed, gathered from monuments of the second century. No doubt, to a certain extent, the wealth and splendour of Zenobia's later time may have brought in with them much licence on a grander scale. Yet there is no record of this, and though it must be confessed that the materials we have to go upon are scanty enough, yet it would appear that the curse of Palmyra was rather fulness of bread than any peculiarly wild debauchery. The most remarkable feature in the tariff-lists is the general plainness of the goods referred to. These comfortable citizens, wealthy and satisfied with themselves, had lost the stimulus of hunger which has produced so many of the nobler qualities of Arab character—"that grand whip, hunger renewed every twenty-four hours, by which it has pleased Providence to impart energy to the human race."[1] They bought an architecture which they did not understand, disfigured it with statues that flattered their vanity, and sank deeper and deeper into that self-indulgence of the uncultured and vulgar, which lacks picturesqueness as much as it lacks idealism.

[1] Townsend, *Asia and Europe*, p. 12.

CHAPTER XII

PALMYRA IN DEATH

At first sight the emblems and memorials of death in Palmyra appear irrelevant and an intrusion. In Egypt, where the dead are perpetually thrust upon the remembrance of the living, there seems a peculiar appropriateness and naturalness in their presence. The life they lived in their day was sombre in its majesty, and they had communed much with death before dying. The tombs of the Pharaohs, the huge vaulted chambers and passages of the Pyramids, and that lonely pit from whose deep floor the effigy of Kephrain still looks up, his slaves buried standing upright in a circle round him,—these are somehow but the inevitable sequels of the savage solemnity that life was for these men. Even in the desert, where the wings of death seem ever to cast their shadow, the lonely wayside graves are natural and congruous. But this mercantile and clattering life of Palmyra seems to have nothing in common with that august shadow. These men taxing their caravans and ordering their statues were surely too busy to find



MORTUARY TOWERS, PALMYRA





time to die. Or if they died, one would expect but little pause in the hurrying crowd, and certainly little expenditure of time or money on the dead.

Yet it is not so. The oldest Palmyrene inscription known is this :—"This sepulchre is that of Athē-nathan, son of Kohailu, which has been built over him by his sons Kohailu and Hairan, his sons who are of the Beni-Maitha."[1] The most distinctive of all the features of Palmyrene architecture—more unique than either their brackets or their statues—is the ring of tomb-towers visible everywhere, that runs round three miles of hill-side girding the city on the heights. Besides these towers, and the underground vaults which in many cases supplement them, there are sarcophagi of the Greek model, richly adorned with carving. But the towers are the characteristic feature of Palmyra's dealing with death. They are Asiatic in form, although the decoration is in the Roman style. Such tombs are found in Mesopotamia, near Bagdad, but nowhere in such numbers as here. In outward appearance they remind one of the pedestal that stands close by the Propylæa at Athens.[2] They are tall square towers, the tallest of them (the Kasr-eth-Thunîyeh) being 111 feet high, and resting on a basement $33\frac{1}{2}$ feet square. The tower itself, slightly tapering, rises above the basement $25\frac{2}{3}$ feet square. Many of them are now but heaps of stones, yet a dozen or two

[1] Cooke, *North-Semitic Inscriptions*, 141.

[2] This pedestal, 55 feet in height, commemorates M. Vipsaniu Agrippa, the son-in-law of Augustus. Its date is about 27 B.C.

of the original 150 remain standing. They all shew a ruinous and broken top edge, with the exception of one, whose graceful and proportioned cornice is still complete, serving its ancient purpose of beautifying the aspect of the tower with shadows when seen in strong sunlight. Some of the towers are extremely plain, and the mortar must have been wonderful that has held together for so long their walls of rubble. But one, the finest of all, and still nearly intact, is of dressed ashlar from foundation to cornice. The lofty doors were in the side that faces the city, and above them, in niches placed for their reception, were torsos or statues of the chief inhabitants of the town, with inscriptions in Palmyrene and Greek.

The doors are wide open, and any one may enter these towers. We climbed to the summit of the tallest tomb remaining, without the slightest difficulty or danger, by a well-preserved stair which runs through each of the six stories in the thickness of the wall. The interiors present in every way one of the most interesting spectacles imaginable. They have been much broken by the religious zeal of Mohammedans who regarded the breaking of noses and obliterating all the features of statues as an act of piety. Nor have they suffered less at the hands of treasure-seekers, who have smashed the shelves of loculi and torn off the slabs of gypsum that sealed their openings. Thus the loculi and the floors of each successive story are strewn with a deep covering of human bones, all parts of the body being mingled in a very ghastly confusion

of fragments. Some of these bones are brown, as if some strong chemical had been used in embalming the bodies; others are of purest white.

In the later tombs—the latest is dated 259 A.D.—"the quicker process of painting took the place of sculpture and engraving." In the hollows of letters there are frequent traces of the red colour of minium upon the white gypsum. The richest is the Virgins' (or Brides') Tower, where some hundreds of the honourable women of Palmyra were laid. The great main chamber, on the ground-level, has its floor now broken, revealing an arched cellar, in which, some 15 feet below the ground, are strewn innumerable fragments of statues and other carved stones. The chamber is perhaps 20 feet in height, and its interior building is entirely faced with white gypsum. Opposite the door a great niche holds several busts, representing, doubtless, the most highly honoured of those buried there; but every one of them is mutilated, and many are gone from their places to the rubbish-heap on the cellar-floor. The stone roof is about a foot in thickness, and the scale of the whole work is large and massive. The sides are wholly occupied by tall rows of loculi, separated from each other by fluted pilasters of pure white, with Corinthian capitals of the most florid style. It is painful to have to relate that even this far nook has not escaped the vandalism of the modern scribbler; and, among records of a similar sort in several languages, there is the inscription, "James Stewart, 1852." Mr. Stewart had evidently his own reasons for fearing that

his claim upon immortality was likeliest to be secured at some distance from his native place, wherever that may have been. No mortar seems to have been used within that tomb, but where block touches block a line of red pigment marks the joining. The roof is very richly ornamented, though the art is poor enough. The blue pigment of the background, from which reliefs of faces look down, is still bright in colour.

The taller tomb, to which we have already referred, is much the same in fashion. The finest chamber is that on the ground-level, above which the successive stories grow plainer, until, at the top, is reached a very simple room, quite unadorned. The roofs of the principal chambers shew elaborate decoration, the effigies of the dead in bas-relief looking vertically down upon the floor from blue spaces, their garments being tinted with green and brownish pink. The panels in which these reliefs are framed are diamond-shaped and hexagonal, and the interspaces are entirely filled with curious figures of birds with wings outstretched. The bones of the dead are everywhere in horrible nakedness and confusion, and few memories are more vivid or more weird than that seen from the farthest recess of the chamber. Looking down the tunnel-like vista of loculi, between the strange colours of the roofs and the scattered and broken skeletons on the floor, you see the brilliant spot of sunlight through the door, and are bewildered by so strange a conflict between life and death.

In the immediate neighbourhood of some of the



A MORTUARY TOWER, PALMYRA





tomb towers there were subterranean burial vaults, dug out of the earth or rock, and built up with white gypsum, the rounded vault of the roof being perhaps a dozen or more feet above the floor. One of these now lies exposed to view in the hill-side below the castle, just across the wall of Justinian. The front of it has been broken all away, and the materials of which it was built removed. Even the adjacent tower, all but a few stones of it, is gone. The only part left is the rounded end of one recess, in which the loculi are still clearly distinguishable, though their shelves are broken. The sight of that fragment, exposed to daylight through a great gap in the ground, had suggested the desire to explore farther caverns, and a thrilling story from Mr. Wright's book lit up the notion with a sense of wild adventure. All the time since our arrival we had been hearing rumours of one such tomb, among the farthest distant group of towers, beyond the underground spring. For some reason this appeared to be the only survivor of the many chambers which now remained in something like its original condition. We inquired, and made our appeal both to the sheikhs and the mudir. For some reason one or other of those authorities had chosen to forbid any man to enter it, and we were answered that it had been built up, that the digging out of an entrance would take many days and cost many piastres, and that several travellers had tried in vain to have it opened for them. One day, as we were photographing among the ruins, a lad who was with us grew confidential, and,

with an air of melodrama, told us that he knew of a shaft which led to the chamber. We at once proposed to go, but he utterly refused, asserting that it was as much as his life was worth, and that none of us dare go by daylight. We tried to persuade him to come by night. He was a very poor lad, to whom a sou was precious, and half a franc was wealth. We offered him increasing sums of silver, and finally a gold Napoleon. But as the sum increased, his terror rose with it, and it was quite evident that though he might easily grow hysterical, he would never take us through the darkness to his shaft. It was impossible to discover what exactly he was afraid of. Certainly there was far more in it than fear of discovery and punishment. It might have been the spirits of the dead ; or the afrites—sand-devils who presumably know an interesting bit of archæology when they see it, and have grace given them to do what they can for its preservation. Again, it might have been Sheitan himself—Sheitan, whom some of our Arab friends had seen several times in the neighbourhood of tombs. "He was like a wind," said one ; "like a shadow," said another. But both assured us that they had been in no fear of danger, since he was friendly to them—a statement, by the way, whose latter part seemed distinctly more credible than its former. Whatever form our boy's nebulous fears were shaping for themselves, we saw that it would be hopeless to persuade him, and so extracted from him as explicit directions as possible. The towers towards which he pointed appeared to stand in a row, seven or eight in

number, about two miles to the south-west of the Colonnade. He counted backwards from the south-west end, and fixed upon the fourth tower, assuring us that the shaft would be found in front of that, at a distance of some five paces.

On the night before our departure from Palmyra we ordered dinner earlier than usual. A settled melancholy had fallen upon the camp owing to the prospect of the approaching journey, a rumour of a recent Arab raid in the neighbourhood of one town we had visited on the outward march, and most of all owing to the purchase of a "rotl" of coffee and many packets of tobacco as a present to the dreaded sheikh Milhem, whom we hoped to visit on the way. After dinner we took towels, and a lighted lantern, and made for the spring in the hill-side. Thence, with lantern extinguished, we cautiously crept round the hill, stumbling along in the dark over masonry of all sorts, among which was one large sarcophagus. We had seen lights moving suspiciously in the neighbourhood of a house near the gardens, but we trusted to the darkness and the dead to keep the Arabs off, and at length reached the tombs. The stars were visible, but not brilliant, and, as there was no moonlight, we were just able to distinguish the tall outlines of the towers, and the larger objects on the ground. The directions of the boy were of little use, for the towers stood not in a line but in a group, and it was impossible to tell which one he had pointed out. So we stumbled about in that silent field of death, finding here and there elusive shafts,

and one cavity containing a broken statue but leading to no farther destination. At last, a shaft about 1½ yards wide seemed to answer to his description. We held the lantern down this shaft and lit it, then cautiously descended, and found bottom some 8 or 10 feet from the surface, and a low tunnel sloping down in the direction of the tower. Crawling along this, we came at the end to a narrow aperture in the side of the tunnel, built of stone, and just large enough to allow us to squeeze through. The lantern showed that there was an easy drop within, upon what appeared to be sand. We somehow wriggled through, and, dropping, found ourselves in the cavern we had sought. It was a large T-shaped chamber, vaulted and entirely faced with white gypsum, that showed no discoloration, and might have been plastered yesterday, so clean and sharp were its edges. The walls were fitted with loculi, but the tomb had been rifled and the shelves and fronts were broken, while skulls, ribs, bones of the arm, leg, neck, and spine lay deep upon the floor among the broken stone, a grim carpet woven of many skeletons. Many of the bones had lost their substance, retaining only their form. When you took hold of them, your thumb and finger met, the bone vanishing in a powder of fine dust. With lighted candles we examined the whole building, and found one large and beautiful white sarcophagus and torso at the farthest recess, the features being unfortunately hopelessly mutilated on the busts. Before going away, we photographed the place by flash-light,





1. BUST FROM PALMYRENE TOMB.

2. UNDERGROUND BURIAL VAULT, PALMYRA.



and it would be difficult to imagine anything more uncanny than the sudden leap of all those *membra disjecta* into stereoscopic distinctness when the powder flashed—as if Judgment Day had come, and bone sought scattered bone. We had little difficulty in scrambling up to the aperture, and soon were at the tents again, where we found two distracted servants waving lanterns in the direction of the spring. They had ventured to come out to search for us, they said, and indeed they had advanced a distance of not less than ten yards! We kept our secret till we were well on our way, and then, when we told them they replied that they had known it: had they not seen us emptying much sand out of our pockets last night?

An indescribable sadness comes upon the spirit of all who have spent a day or two among the tombs of the ancient dead; and these tombs of Palmyra, both by their preservation and their brokenness, supply endless suggestions of pathos and tenderness. The detail of busy, ordinary life, seen across so great a gulf of darkness, takes on a new and heart-searching significance; and all is transformed, being seen now no longer in the living sunshine but as it were by the light of a lamp hung in a sepulchre. First of all, there are the chosen emblems carved for some reason which can now be only guessed at. The young men often hold in their hands rolls, or squared blocks of a small size—possibly to indicate readers or builders. Spindle and thread are held by several women, and sprays or nosegays of flowers are in the hands of others, while many

effigies, both of men and women, are holding bunches of grapes. Very frequently, both for men and women, the background is of palm branches, that carry over the remembrance of loyalty to the city into the new land whither they are exiled. No part of the busts is executed with greater minuteness than the hair and ornaments of the women. Women were honoured in Palmyra and evidently greatly loved. They rest beside their husbands and brothers and are mourned in the same epitaphs, and their effigies carved side by side upon the same slabs. The busts of the men, with close-cropped hair and beard, are as a rule of inferior workmanship to those of the women.

Looking down upon the numberless confusion of bones upon the floor, one knows the meaning of Tennyson's "wrinkled ostler," with his invitation to the dance—

> Death is king, and Vivat Rex!
> Tread a measure on the stones,
> Madam—if I know your sex,
> From the fashion of your bones.

Or, in that tower of the dead brides, the strains of Madge Wildfire's song come to the mind:—

> "Who makes the bridal bed,
> Birdie, say truly?"
> "The gray-headed sexton
> That delves the grave duly."
>
> The glow-worm o'er grave and stone
> Shall light thee steady;
> The owl from the steeple sing,
> "Welcome, proud lady."

But the " six braw gentlemen " that carried these brides to their sleeping-place had it in their hearts to remember every trifle that they had worn, these

dear dead women, with such hair too.

A small squared bead of yellow glass, with a brightly-coloured bird of dainty mosaic let into it, tells its own tale. The arm-rings and earrings are there, the diadems and turbans, the head-bands that held up such ornate and complicated coiffures, representing the changing fashions of the centuries, from hair close braided that lay along the cheeks, to richly-flowing locks that swept back from the temples in luxuriant waves. It is the more startling, for all this beauty, to come suddenly upon the inscription—" Akiba, son of Athe-Akab, the leper. Alas ! " And among the mingled bones some are to be found whose sockets are roughened with excrescences that tell plainly of torturing days of pain.

The very names, those of them whose original meaning is decipherable, seem to have regained the significance which doubtless usage had worn quite away as they sounded in the streets and courts. *Tadmor* (the equivalent of Palmyra) occurs on the tomb of the daughter of Zebida, and recalls the fabulous lady of that name, daughter of Hassan. One Simon has built a vault in honour of his father Phila (the Elephant). Whether such names of animals are relics of ancient tribal divisions that lead again still further back to totem-worshipping times, we cannot tell. There

are many of them, such as Yagrûr, the toad; the weasel, the mouse, the hedgehog, and others. One or two remind us of the picturesque names of Red Indian warriors, such as Rabâbet, "white cloud," and Abroga, "flashing light." Pet names sometimes occur, indicated by their duplicated consonant, in words such as Jaddai. One inscription, on a cave to the south-west of the town, tells that "this grave has been made by Joy" (Hadoof).

Altogether there is much that redeems those grim houses of death by its persistent human touch. The exterior inscriptions were in Greek and Palmyrene, but within the doors they wrote of their dead in their beloved native speech alone. Statues of children clasping each other's hands, and of mothers with their little ones in their arms, tell of Love among the Ruins. Among the Arabs this tenderness is still found in many beautiful and ancient customs. Forder relates how in the dismal heart of Arabia, whither he wandered and met with much unkindness, when a horse dies or a little child, some neighbour will bring his horse or his child to the door of the bereaved one, to be borrowed for seven days, that the poignancy of the grief may be a little broken and relieved.[1] So in ancient Palmyra there is abundant evidence that with all their bustling ambitions they still found time for love.

That ring of towers, with which the Palmyrenes enclosed their city's life, presents some strange questions to the speculative mind. It would, no doubt, be unfair

[1] Forder, *Arabs in Tent and Town*, p. 217.

to take the inscriptions upon tombs as an accurate criterion of a people's faith. For one thing, such records often share the conventionality into which those who have not fought out to an issue their fight of faith always fall when they encounter solemn or religious things. Of these, some hold on to a faith for which they have never found a groundwork of reason ; while others have indeed discovered such a groundwork, but have lacked the spiritual energy to erect upon it anything that could be called a faith. So, in all generations, many men abide in a kind of religious or quasi-philosophical stupor, in which hope and mistrust, sentimentality and reason are indistinguishably blended. To this source may be traced a vast number of the epitaphs upon tombstones, which so often surprise the reader with a sense of unnaturalness and incongruity. Either a praiseworthy reticence has kept back the mourner from uttering all of hope that his heart would speak, or else a desire to say the right thing has led him to say too much. Yet, although such inscriptions must ever form a most imperfect criterion, they have a certain value ; and where any living faith is present, its record will be unmistakable. In the catacombs no one can doubt that he has entered the resting-places of those that believe.

The Palmyrenes have certainly given us little guidance or suggestion in their funereal inscriptions. You wade through scores of records that are practically identical, stating only the names and genealogies of the dead, with sometimes a note or two as to their occupa-

tions or ages, with the one word Alas! (Hebel) added in almost every instance, until even that word ceases to give forth its meaning, and changes from a cry to a propriety. There was little in the original Arabian traditions of the race to encourage the hope of any life beyond the grave. The Græco-Roman world in these centuries was indeed filled with an immense curiosity concerning death and what lay beyond it, but there is nothing to indicate this among these sepulchres. There are no traces of Christian influence upon Palmyra;[1] and the Jews, if indeed they themselves held any such hopes, seem to have taken no pains to communicate them. The Arab is indeed familiar with death, and Mohammed has taught him a most vital and operative faith in a very earthly Paradise beyond it. Yet in some respects this faith is strangely represented in the actual sentiments and customs of Arabia. There is, indeed, much pomp and circumstance displayed in connection with death and burial. Yet, in spite of a wholesome fear of the spirit of the buried, the Arab will not hesitate to play a trick upon him if he can, and there is said to be frequent stealing of graves.[2] It may have

[1] This is the more remarkable in view of the fact that Paul of Samatosa, Bishop of Antioch, was Zenobia's viceroy in that city. He was a man "whose subtle intellect played dangerously with the mysteries of faith." The Syrian bishops accused him of heresy, and pronounced his deposition about 269 A.D., but it was not until the fall of Palmyra had withdrawn from him the protection of Zenobia that they were able to execute the sentence.

[2] For a curious instance of such trickery, cf. *The Holy Land*, by the present writer, p. 262.

been much the same with the Palmyrenes of old, although it would certainly appear that they treated death and the dead with greater dignity than the modern Arab shews. Yet in every way the tombs are depressing, and that chapter in *The New Republic* where the tombs of the dead women are described, returned persistently to memory with its chill darkness, as we wandered there. For these towers were built at a period when the old myths were losing their hold upon men's faith, or at least upon their assurance, even in the provinces, nor had any outburst of the new hope come upon Palmyra. On the contrary, the usual Palmyrene term for a grave is "This house of eternity," to which is sometimes added a curse upon any who might desecrate it: "And let no man open over him this niche for ever—and with bread and water may he [who opens it] never be satisfied." So they lay in state for certain years, that ring of dead archers, merchants, and brides, encompassing the ruins of the city they had loved to live in, in towers like those "grey, rain-beaten palaces, each shut and deserted on the death of the king," which Mason describes in Morocco.[1] But in time the desecraters came, a race that could not read the threatenings on the walls, nor would have desisted if they had read them. Then Time, the great destroyer, had his way with the crumbling masonry, and the towers of the dead are now themselves dying, with none to bind up their wounds. So careless are the moderns of the ancient dignities, that in the present village there is a

[1] *Miranda of the Balcony*, xix.

great stone lintel over the door of a house, bearing an inscription which shews it to have been part of the tomb of the first Odenathus.

It is not, however, in the absence of prophecies of immortality, nor even in the ravages of time and vandalism, that one feels the depression most. It is in the entire absence of symbolism of any kind, which might have shewn at least some free play of imagination among the deeper thoughts of life and death. The poetic sadness of Etruscan and Greek funereal inscriptions is wanting here. There is nothing of the passionate protest and despair of the Alkestis. There is nothing like the emblems of roses and wheat which are to be seen on the tombs of the Khedives in Cairo, nor of the poppies and corn so exquisitely carved on the Temple of Bacchus in Baalbek. Such emblems are among the finest testimonies in the world to the hunger for immortality, or at least to that "sense of tears in mortal things" which reached its most perfect expression in the poetry of Virgil. Even the Mohammedan Arabs, in their cynical way, have sought to express their feelings regarding death. Their proverb is typical which runs: "It is better to sit than to stand; it is better to lie than to sit; it is better to sleep than to lie; it is better to die than to sleep." And sometimes one comes across a bitter inscription which recalls to mind Strabo's account of that stone figure at Anchiale, snapping the fingers of its right hand, and its accompanying inscription:—"Sardanapalus, son of Anacyndaraxis, built Anchiale and Tarsus in

one day. Eat, drink, play, nothing else is worth even *that.*"[1]

At times one finds a legend of rare beauty, such as the Moslem story of the burial of Moses.[2] The aged prophet, "walking in the mountains, saw a hill as white as snow, and four men working hard at scooping a room. These were four angels in disguise, to deceive the prophet. 'What are you doing here?' he asked of them. 'We are ordered by our King,' was the reply, 'to prepare a room wherein to shut his most precious treasure, and this is why we have retired to the desert. Our task is nearly finished, and we are to wait until the precious freight arrives—it cannot be long.' The sun was very hot, and there was no shade anywhere but only the cavern, which was invitingly cool. Moses was very tired, and sat down to rest on the stone bench at its farther end. One of the workmen approached, and offered him most respectfully a beautiful apple, which the prophet accepted to quench his thirst—it is always an apple!—but so soon as he had eaten, the eternal sleep stole over him. The angels carried his soul to God, and his body remained in the cave."

We may be pardoned for recalling these things at some length, in order that the contrast may be the more strongly felt between such frank and patient expressions of the sentiments naturally associated with death, and the want of them in the Palmyrene tombs. The

[1] The Earl of Ronaldshay, *On the Outskirts of Empire in Asia*, p. 46.

[2] Isabella Burton, *The Inner Life of Syria*, p. 195.

only thing that may perhaps be symbolic is the bird, held in the left hand of some of the female figures on funereal sculptures, but there is nothing to indicate what its significance may have been. There is no record even of such lower forms of communion with the dead as may be included under the general title of necromancy. In Nero's time, Tiridates of Armenia brought magians with him to Rome, and we are told that they conjured up a spirit for the Emperor. In the third century we read of an Oracle in Palmyra, which may be supposed to have had some necromantic associations. But concerning all this the tombs are silent.

Instead of any such symbolism or idealistic play of imagination, we are continually struck by the practical and secular character of the thoughts which are inscribed on the tombs. In death we seem to be in the midst of life. Here there is a notice of the "gift" of a share of the vault and the exhedra opposite; and lest there should be any mistake, it is specified that this gift consists of eight niches. Again, the simple record "Male, son of Jadu, son of Jadiabel" is repeated four times on the same wall, as if the lust of possession, even in death, were still a ruling passion. The megalomania which characterises the busts of the Colonnade is taken over to the towers, and costliness and display are everywhere obtruded. There is a strange want of reticence in the very fact of that ring of towers planted full in view of the city's life. Yet these seem to have been anything but the skeleton at the feast. Their grandeur was more flattering to the inhabitants

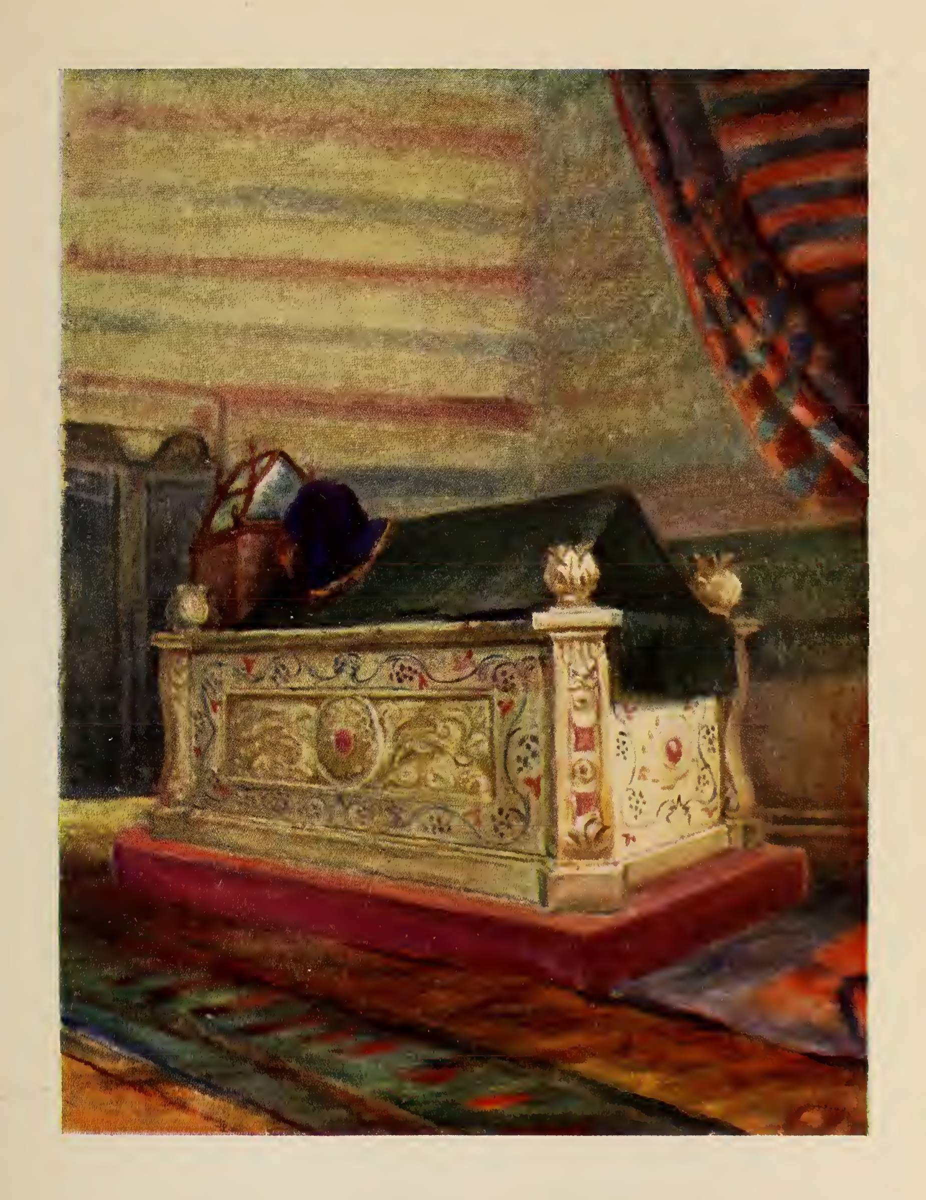
than their reminders of mortality were depressing. This bourgeois quality of their thought is apparent in the combination of magnificence and commonness which characterises even the architecture of the grandest towers. Their cost must have been enormous, but the art is often very bad, and the general impression of the interiors is that of a plain neatness which somehow jars upon the eye, with the same sense of incongruity with the greatness and pretentiousness of the external architecture as would be produced by stucco-work in an ancient abbey.

What is quite obvious is that the tomb is neither more nor less than a perpetuation of the earthly dwelling-place. So far as form goes, this may be accepted as the universal custom in ancient sepulture. The tomb was the eternal house of the man who had been moved to it from his temporary house on earth. In very many instances, allowing for the alterations rendered necessary by the great change from life to death, the resemblance between the two houses was maintained in details, and it is evident that the idea was present in the minds of the ancient tomb-builders, lending a peculiar pathos to the thought of death. The perpetuation in the tomb of the former habitation of the living has indeed its kindly side. There is a street in Cairo where the tombs of the dead are enclosed in walls like house-walls, with windows, and every other appearance of dwellings for the living, except that they have no roofs. In the time of Ramadan the relatives of the dead come to live in these houses for a day or two beside their

departed. And this must be conceded to Palmyrenes also. The one lamp that lights their sepulchres is that of filial piety, and the kindly remembrance of friends after death. That is something ; it is much. Yet if it be the one thing that relieves ostentation and vulgar secularity, one cannot but ask "How far can that project thy soul on its lone way ?" These people, at a time when even Rome was fighting hard for immortality, seem to have been of those who "waged not any war with death." It is said that Saladin, when he felt himself to be dying, ordered his standard-bearer to descend to the streets, carrying his winding-sheet on a high pole and crying out to the people, "Lo, this is all that remains of the great Saladin." There is in all Palmyra no trace of any such philosophising. In one sense, indeed, they fought for so-called immortality even after death had sounded the retreat, just as they had fought for it with their brackets and their pillars before. But what an immortality it was, that mere lavishness of costly building ! There are no pilgrims, bearing the corpses of their beloved to holy ground, like the pilgrims of the Euphrates and Tigris valleys. In them there is no bitter cry of vain but valiant protest, nor tender acquiescence of faith. Their thought neither sank to the grim depths where the spirit of man wrestles with demons, nor did it soar to the heights of heaven. In it there is no feel of eternity nor of the spirit-land at all. It is but a perpetuated life of the shop and the caravan that the dead live in their towers—of the earth, earthy.



TOMB OF SALADIN, INTERIOR





Yet perhaps that is too harsh a judgment. The true workman grudges the work of his hands to decay. He flings out the thing he has constructed into the future, hoping that, though he perish, it at least will endure. In this faint shadow of a hope of immortality we may find a nobler meaning in those magnificent tombs built by men who have left no record of any belief in a personal endurance for themselves after death. The endurance of the sepulchre is not the immortality of the man, but it may be at least the record of his protest against annihilation and forgetfulness, and his pathetic attempt at something which he might persuade himself to call Eternal Life.

CHAPTER XIII

SUB SPECIE AETERNITATIS

After gathering what can be gathered from our slender sources of information regarding the attitude of Palmyra to the problems of life and death, there still remain haunting questions as to its conception, and that of such sister-cities as Baalbek, of the unseen world for whose sake such great and costly temples were erected. It is commonly supposed that in the third century of the Christian era there was practically no faith left among educated men ; and while in so remote a part of the empire as Palmyra we might expect to find fashions of belief as well as other fashions somewhat behind the times, yet the wide diffusion of ideas and of Græco-Roman culture, and the habit of travel, would tend to equalise matters at least among the educated, and to produce throughout the empire a more or less common type of thought. The power of belief is a gift rather than a faculty that can be acquired, and it is generally supposed that this gift had been withdrawn from these late children of the earlier believers. From all that we have seen as yet, it might well be that no faith remained

in these cities then. Palmyra has been called the golden city of the dead gods, in which the present life was everything. Those who rose above the prevalent commercialism rose no higher (so one might think) than the philosophy of the Arab proverb, "A sponge to wipe out the past, a rose to make the present fragrant, and a kiss to salute the future." [1]

Yet it has been well said that "It is never safe to trust sweeping censure of the morals of a whole age or people," [2] and any such sweeping statements as to the faith or want of faith of a whole people must be still more precarious. Paganism was "an unconscionable time in dying," and although those ruins in the copper-coloured glow of sunset may well suggest a city of dead souls rolling on to the furnaces of Judgment Day, rather than a great idealism laid in the dust, yet the problem is a far subtler one than any such summary as that expresses. It would seem that as faith was dying out, the architecture of religion was growing steadily in size, in fineness, and in costliness. But architecture depends for its spirit on faith, and it has been happily remarked that no one can make even a real gargoyle now upon a church, for the feeling and imagination which produced such works came of lively faith in the reality of the beings they represented.[3] Yet there is no lack of spirit in the temples either of Palmyra or Baalbek. True, there is neither the purity nor the rationality

[1] Benson, *The Image in the Sand*, p. 289.

[2] Dill, *Roman Society in the Last Century of the Western Empire*, p. 97.

[3] Elworthy, *The Evil Eye*, p. 231.

alike of spring and of repose which are to be seen in the temples of Greece or of Sicily. Yet there is more in them than mere sordidness and vulgarity of showy expenditure. Men might jest over their wine at the stories of the gods which their children learned at school, but yet they were seeking for some answer to the questions which that easy scepticism only forced upon them the more insistently. They built these temples while their faith was decaying—built shrines of unparalleled magnificence for gods and goddesses which they shrewdly suspected had never existed—yet the building was not without its spiritual explanations. It is an old story and a new one. The Sphinx at Ghizeh, looking high and far across the desert while the camels go by black against the sunset, smiles the same unfathomable smile as of old when the worshippers trooped to its temple. It is easy to profess faith and easier still to profess scepticism, but the truth is a subtle thing and deeper hidden than either, and in all ages the mind of man knows that this is so.

For light on this fascinating problem, one turns instinctively to Longinus, that "last representative of expiring classicism," who was the guide and friend of Zenobia, and who paid for his devotion with his life when Aurelian took Palmyra.[1] It is with a painful shock that we read in that same preface which so happily likens him, in "that high seriousness which comes of absolute sincerity," to our own Matthew Arnold, that the author of Longinus's *Treatise on the*

[1] Roberts, *Longinus on the Sublime.*



TEMPLE OF THE KING'S MOTHER, PALMYRA





Sublime "is probably *not* the historical Longinus, while the subject is *not* the sublime in the ordinary acceptation of that term." Regarding the earlier authorship the evidence appears incontrovertible, yet the teaching is so exactly appropriate to Palmyra that one is almost tempted to believe in spite of disproof. Moses is quoted, as he could not but be in a community which included so many Jews. The treatise is one continued plea for elevation of soul, expressed throughout in a tone of profound and lofty earnestness. "Nature . . . implants in our souls the unconquerable love of whatever is elevated and more divine than we."[1] "For the love of money (a disease from which we all now suffer sorely) and the love of pleasure make us their thralls, or rather, as one may say, drown us body and soul in the depths, the love of riches being a malady which makes men petty, and the love of pleasure one which makes them most ignoble."[2] "The ruin of such lives will gradually reach its complete consummation, and sublimities of soul fade and wither away and become contemptible, when men are lost in admiration of their own mortal parts and omit to exalt that which is immortal."[3] "In an age which is ravaged by plagues so sore, is it possible for us to imagine that there is still left an unbiassed and incorruptible judge of works that are great and likely to reach posterity, or is it not rather the case that all are influenced in their decisions by the passion for gain?" Faithful words these for Palmyra in Life!

[1] Roberts, *Longinus on the Sublime*, p. 135. [2] *Ibid.* p. 157. [3] *Ibid.* p. 159.

and if she did not hear them from Longinus as his own, there is something so apposite in them that we may at least hope he passed them on to her from that Dionysius who now claims their authorship. The chief point of interest, however, in the present connection, is that the *Treatise on the Sublime* expressly repudiates faith in the Homeric legends of the gods, and accuses Homer of having made, "as far as lay within his power, gods of the men concerned in the siege of Troy, and men of the gods."[1] If that was the view expressed by a philosopher of the first century, *a fortiori* we may take it that Longinus in the third century must have gone at least as far in the direction of scepticism.

While among the learned such scepticism must have been practically universal, the old faith still lingered among the illiterate and especially among the women. The same phenomenon is to be seen to-day in regard to the Catholicism of rural France and the Hindooism of India. "In country places," says Dill, "sometimes even with the connivance of indifferent officials, the old temples were still frequented, and sacrifices were still offered more than fifty years after the death of the great Theodosius."[2] That was more than a century later than the fall of Palmyra, and we may be sure that it held good of that city also down to Zenobia's time. Indeed we may take it for certain that those busy, worldly, unideal citizens, as well as the slaves and ignorant villagers,

[1] Roberts, *Longinus on the Sublime*, p. 63.

[2] *Roman Society*, p. 23.

were many of them believers in the gods. They had not time for culture, nor (so far as we can judge) were they very likely to indulge themselves to any great extent in the delights of speculation. Busy men who are making money rapidly demand a simple faith. It is all they have time for, and they resent the interrupting and unsettling questions which agitate the minds of the thinkers.

That this must have been the state of mind usual among the Palmyrene bourgeoisie we have abundant proof in the inscriptions. We have already referred to that abstemious divinity whose face is set against the drinking of wine.[1] An altar with a long inscription is dedicated to him by one Obaidon, on which he is referred to as "the good and generous god."[2] This, of course, may be a merely conventional phrase, like that of the tomb "consecrated to the gods of the dead," by a Palmyrene centurion of the time of Marcus Aurelius.[3] In A.D. 146 we find a group of Palmyrene travellers erecting a column and architrave in Nezala (Karyatein) to the local divinity, "the great God of Nezala," in gratitude for their preservation from some danger.[4] The special god of Palmyra is Yaribol, and Flinders Petrie discovered an inscription to him at Coptos in Egypt,[5] while on several monuments we read the name Yaribola, the man being called after the name of his god. But there are inscriptions more intimate and convincing than these,

[1] P. 308. [2] *Répertoire*, 285. [3] *Ibid.* 52.
[4] *Ibid.* 449. [5] Cooke, *North-Semitic Inscriptions*, 146.

inscriptions evidently telling of a genuine devotion. An early monument is erected by the sons of Maliku to the god of their father's house, for the life of his brothers and sons.[1] Another, of uncertain date, is dedicated to "the good and warm-hearted god Azizou for the life of the donor and his brother."[2] This title, "warm-hearted" or "compassionate," is often found, and in many cases it evidently tells of gratitude for some deliverance from sickness or from danger. The following inscriptions, dating from the middle of the third century, may complete the list of our quotations, though many others might be cited. They bear all the marks of simple and hearty faith :—

> Blessed be his name for ever [the good] and the compassionate! Offered in thanksgiving by . . . (son of) Lishamsh to the compassionate one who delivered him by sea and land, and answered him, and . . .
>
> Giving thanks every day . . . for their life, to Aglibol and Malak-Bel.[3]

Faith was not, however, by any means confined in the third century either to the illiterate or even to the middle-class part of the population. The great Aurelian, himself sprung from the ranks, was reported to be the son of a priestess of the Sun, and it is recorded that he "attributed his victory over Zenobia to the god's favour."[4] Certainly when he spoiled the temple at Palmyra, it was only to erect a similar one in Rome,

[1] Cooke, *North-Semitic Inscriptions*, 136.
[2] *Répertoire*, 30.
[3] Cooke, *North-Semitic Inscriptions*, 138, 139.
[4] *Roman Society*, p. 66.

to which he transferred its treasures.[1] A hundred years after Aurelian's time men of rank and dignity were found in such numbers upholding the ancient worship in the face of the most drastic edicts, as to make it evident that the cause of paganism was by no means even then generally regarded as hopeless. Flavianus, when he died by his own hand after the battle on the Frigidus, in which Theodosius defeated him, had "staked all on the success of the pagan cause and lost."[2] After that time there were men like Symmachus left to plead for paganism, and in the early years of the fifth century St. Augustine still found it necessary to devote thirteen years of his life to the writing of the *City of God*, which at last struck its death-blow to the pagan faith.[3] Thus we find a strange vitality in the older faith, that lived side by side with the encroaching scepticism, not only in communities, but within the minds of individuals. It is probable that in a community like Palmyra in the later part of the third century every educated man, with the exception of a few extremists on either side, would be inconsistent as regards his religious convictions. In some directions he would be sceptical and in others believing, and would even vary in his views of the same religious

[1] This temple was dedicated in 274 A.D., on December 25, "the birthday of the Unconquered Sun." "Henceforward *Sol invictus*, of whose effulgence the lawful ruler of the Empire was the earthly emanation, was exalted by Aurelian above all the gods of Rome, and was honoured with the title 'Lord of the Roman Empire,' which appears on the coinage." (Stuart Jones, *Roman Empire*, p. 336.)

[2] *Ibid.* bk. i. chaps. i. ii. iii.

[3] *Ibid.* bk. i. chaps. i. ii. iii.

problems from one time to another according to the mood of the hour.

When we come to ask why, in such a time, the old religion lived on at all, and what explanation can be given of that vitality in it which was able to defy the powerful forces of rationalism, we find ourselves face to face with one of the most interesting and complex problems in the whole history of faith. The great fact which has to be remembered is that here we are dealing with the influence of the East upon the West. Now, as has been already stated,[1] the influence of the East was strong on the side of mystery against any sort of rationalism. If it be true of paganism generally that its beliefs were "food for the imagination or emotions; they were never articles of faith,"[2] that view is doubly true of Eastern religious conceptions. "The Eastern nations," writes Professor Butcher, "speaking generally, had loved to move in a region of twilight, content with that half-knowledge which stimulates the religious sense. They had thought it impious to draw aside the veil which hides God from man. They had shrunk in holy awe from the study of causes, from inquiries into origin, from explaining the perplexed ways of the universe. Ignorance had been the sacred duty of the layman. Scientific questioning and discovery could hardly exist where (as in many parts of the East) each fresh gain of earth was thought to be so much robbery of heaven."[3] From earliest times to latest this holds

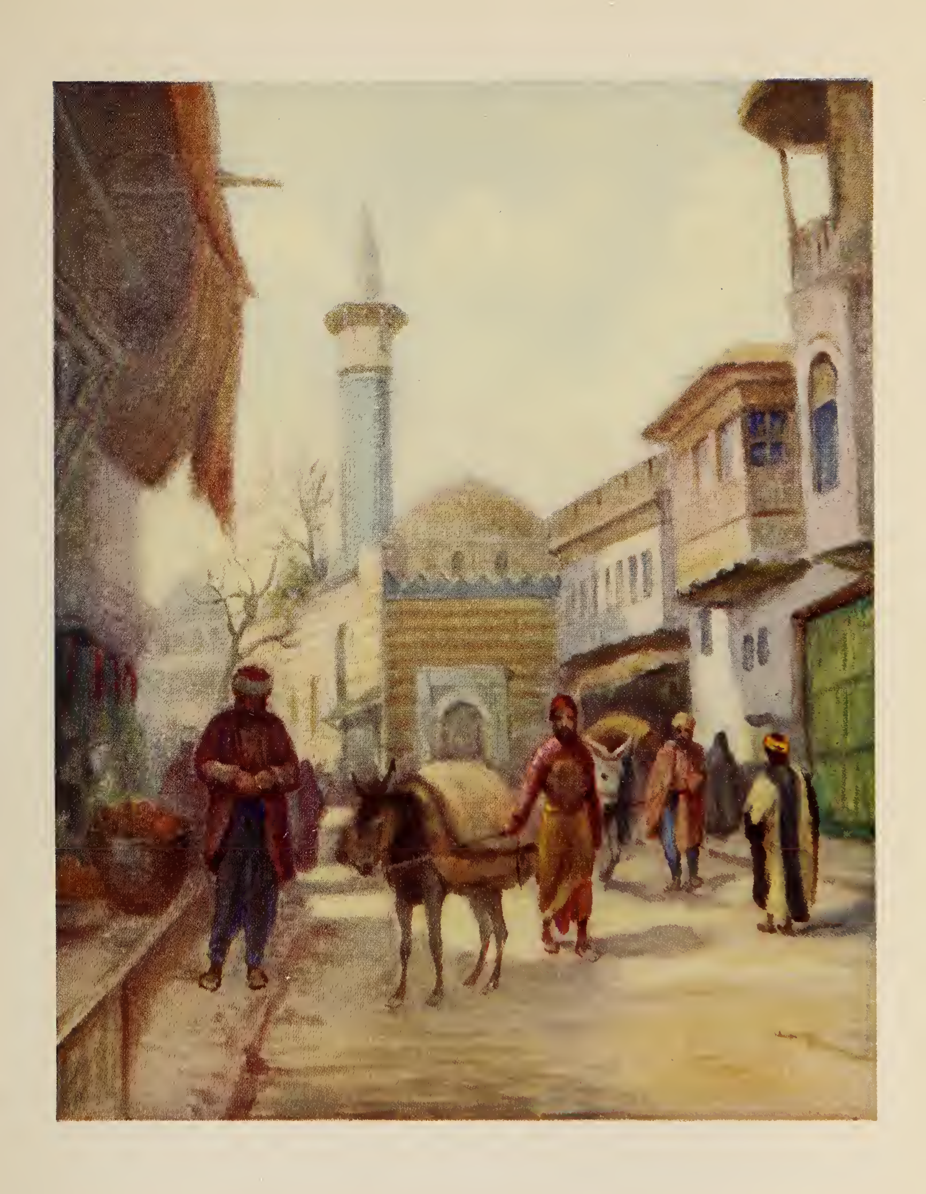
[1] P. 2.

[2] *Roman Society*, p. 84.

[3] *Some Aspects of the Greek Genius*, p. 2.



THE DERVISHIYEH MOSQUE, DAMASCUS





true. No one who has witnessed a procession of Mohammedan dervishes, or the Feast of the Trampling, where the faithful prostrate themselves side by side in a corduroy road over which pilgrims from Mecca ride on horseback,[1] will doubt the power of ritual detached from any particular meaning upon the minds of Moslems. And in the dawn of history we find it the same. "Our modern habit is to look at religion from the side of belief rather than of practice[2] . . . but the antique religions had for the most part no creed; they consisted entirely of institutions and practices."[3] It has been necessary to insist upon this point at some length, because it is at once so difficult fully to realise, and of such crucial importance to our present inquiry. Where men's faith seeks for the correct ritual, and tends to be satisfied with that without troubling to discover its meaning, all things are possible in the way of reconciliations and compromises between such opposite states of mind as scepticism and credulity.

Now there were three great influences at work, each of which must have tended to the preservation of the older faith. The first of these was national and patriotic. The Roman of the ancient type had Rome for his religion above all stories of the gods. That type was conservative, and it refused to pick and choose the essential from the merely accidental among Roman institutions. Julian might indeed reform the religion

[1] Thomson, *The Land and the Book*, bk. iii. p. 119.

[2] Cf. p. 165.

[3] W. Robertson Smith, *Semites*, p. 16.

and remove its practical abuses, but the religion itself was so much bound up in his conception with the Roman State and customs, that he was one of those who were "disqualified from leading the race onward into a noble future merely because they so well knew and loved an only less noble past."[1] Nor was it merely for the Eternal City that these "obstinate pagans" fought. Besides those who were moved by the mere sentiment of the past, and those whose conservative principles regarded change as dangerous to the State, there were many whose loyalties were given to that Grecian spirit and literature and culture which Rome held in trust for the world. "They were fighting not for an effete mythology, but for the whole past of Greece; nay, as it seemed, in a certain sense, for the civilisation of the world."[2] In the fluid condition of the general faith, with its keen sense of mystery in all things, and its preference of ritual to dogma, it would not be difficult for men whose imagination had been trained and whose intellect had been whetted to keenest edge by the literature of Greece, to accept in a poetic way the whole mythology of paganism, and to refrain from closer definitions which might have made such faith difficult.

It is needless to remind the reader that the religions with which Palmyra had been brought in contact on the eastern side of the Euphrates were inwoven warp and woof with national and patriotic loyalties. The Oriental kings were ever sons and brothers of the

[1] Myers, *Classical Essays*, p. 93.

[2] *Ibid.* p. 92.

gods, and their subjects could never for a moment separate even in imagination the ancient worship from their duty as citizens and patriots. Doubtless it was the same with the Palmyrenes. The romance of their city, created by their hands and their fathers' hands out of the desert, and growing under the eyes of each generation into a richer beauty, was sure to breed an enthusiastic patriotism that would be all the more intense because it was on so small a scale. But if the city was new, its gods were ancient, and all the influences that played upon their rising life from East or West made for the same identification of civic with religious ideas. This may throw light upon such phrases as "consecrated to the Fortune of Thaimi" (*i.e.* to the deity specially identified with the fortunes of his house). It certainly lends fuller meaning to the typical ascription "lovers of their city and fearers of the gods."[1]

A second and even deeper influence operating in favour of the older paganism was that indestructible instinct in man which leads him out by various pathways into the unseen world of spirit. The forms in which he may conceive of that world may vary, and his methods of seeking his way into it may change, but in some form or other it still claims him, and when he hears its call he must arise and go. Hence it frequently happens that the ages when faith is declining are those in which superstition flourishes most abundantly, and the somewhat commonplace type of thought

[1] Cooke, *North-Semitic Inscriptions*, 110.

which we have noted as characteristic of Palmyra is likely to be a peculiarly fertile ground for superstition.

A nobler path of exit upon the unseen world is that supplied by man's longing for immortality. Professor Dill has, in his most recently published volume,[1] shewn with a vast amount of research how in the early centuries of the Christian era this hunger for immortality had grown to a famine, and the Roman world was everywhere crying out for some hope of a life beyond the grave. Such a craving, and even such a hope, appears to be capable of lingering on after the detailed beliefs of a religion have been surrendered. If our estimate of Palmyra be the correct one, there was a quite unusually meagre desire for immortality in any genuine sense of the word. That they were anxious to be remembered after death is of course proclaimed on all hands beyond the limits of modesty. But it seems to have been only the unthinking claim upon the remembrance of the future made by many who have left little that is really worth perpetuating. "Rome," it has been said, "was laughing when she died." Palmyra was buying and selling and ordering statues. Once again we think of Longinus, and are reluctant to believe that the Palmyrenes did not hear his question, "In what spirit will each succeeding age listen to me who have written this?"[2] Yet, so far as it goes, there is at least some kinship between this costly rage for a merely nominal remembrance, and the nobler epitaphs

[1] *Roman Society from Nero to Marcus Aurelius.*

[2] *On the Sublime*, xiv. 3.

of other lands and cities. The Arabs have a saying, "We build for decay." At least Palmyra built with the hope of endurance for their graven stones, if not of immortality for themselves, and even this feeble challenge to decay shows some vitality of spirit, though in the end it has but created a field of priceless wreckage.

If, however, Palmyra was slow to tread in the nobler path, there is no reason to question her readiness for the more ignoble one of superstitious magic. Superstition clings and spreads on a decaying faith like fungus-growth on a dead tree. "The belief in the arts of magic, divination, and astrology was probably the most living and energetic force in the pagan sentiment of the time. These practices had always been suspected by Roman statesmen. The cultivation of them was condemned under the severest penalties by the legislation of the fourth and fifth centuries. Yet it was never really suppressed, and, in its strange terrors and seductions, it perpetuated the power of heathenism far into the Christian ages."[1] "These men who have not a particle of religious belief are the slaves of anile superstition. They will not bathe or breakfast or start on a journey till they have consulted the calendar to find the position of a planet."[2]

The innumerable superstitions which prevail, and have in every age prevailed, in those regions, all involve the belief in the presence and the power of lesser and nearer spirits upon whom the mantle of the older gods has fallen. The air and all the elements

[1] *Roman Society*, p. 41. [2] *Ibid.* p. 102.

are teeming with them, and every place is haunted. Some of them are malign, and all of them uncanny. The propitiation of evil powers gave rise to devil-worship in some places, and the acknowledged principle of magic in the East is that it is always prudent "to take off your hat to the devil." Genii, to be controlled only by magic words and signs, fill the imagination of the ancient East. They are common among the sculptures of Baalbek, and one large slab shows the figures of two genii lifting a veil. That emblem is certainly significant. The undying curiosity of men to penetrate the secret and solve the mystery of life, baffled by the impossibility of holding any longer the robust and unquestioning faith in the gods, was now turning for help to lesser agencies, nearer the earth and easier to believe in. The phenomena of nature, unexplained until the dawn of science, were sufficiently marvellous to give apparent justification to the most fantastic imaginings; and overhead there went on nightly that dance of the stars which gave birth to astrology. Signs of the zodiac and the six-rayed magic star of Solomon are found among the ruins both of Baalbek and Palmyra.

But, so far as Palmyra is concerned, by far the most interesting exit of man upon the unseen world is the oracle. As this professed to be the authentic voice of the god communicating his mind to his worshippers, one would imagine that it could only flourish in the days when faith was simple and as yet unshaken. The contrary, however, is the case. In his charming essay



THE SMALL TEMPLE, BAALBEK, EXTERIOR





on *Greek Oracles*, Mr. F. W. H. Myers quotes two of the finest oracular responses ever recorded, in connection with the later years of Porphyry, near the close of the third century. The thoughts of men concerning the gods that spoke were no longer unclouded, but from out the cloud of infinitely entangled dreams and shadowy philosophy the voice was still heard, rich as ever in human pathos and poetic diction. The explanation of this may be that the luxury of relief from the responsibilities of choice was too great to be forgone, even when it would have been fatal to try to rationalise it; and for the sake of that luxury men closed their eyes to their own scepticism, and borrowed for the moment the faith they had abandoned. Yet there is more in the persistence of the oracles than that. The silence of God is ever hard upon man, who can in no age live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. If the gods were dead, the need for them was only the more alive; and in the wistful hope in the offchance that after all there might be somewhere that which would answer when they called, men consulted oracles still. Nay, in the dimmer light of a faith that cannot look with steady gaze upon the object of its worship, there is some compensation in the romantic feeling that one has found a byway to the spiritual world.

The oracle of Yaribol, god of Palmyra, was a famous one in its day. From an inscription[1] we learn that it was he who was consulted at the Fountains of

[1] Waddington, 2571.

Afka.[1] That Julius Aurelius Zabd-ila, whose peaceable life we have discussed already,[2] has the testimony engraved on his monument that "the god Yaribol bore witness to him," presumably by his oracle.[3] Sometimes, indeed, the oracles were put to trifling uses, as in the case of that dream "which seemed to indicate a bath, yet not without a certain ambiguity, or the dream which left him in distressing uncertainty whether he were to take an emetic or no."[4] The oracle of Yaribol appears to have strongly objected to being trifled with, even when those who consulted him were very far from intending anything frivolous. To some who inquired as to the issue of Aurelian's expedition, he answered in the conventional enigmatic style about a falcon and doves. But to those ambitious Palmyrenes who asked him whether they were to obtain the empire of the East, he replied in a couplet difficult to render in polite English, but whose equivalent might be given as: "Clear out of my temple, you cunning blackguards; you are sickening the immortal gods."[5]

There was, however, a third way of exit into the Unseen, more effective and far-reaching than either man's hunger for immortality or his curiosity that sought the secret in magic or by oracles. This was the tendency to syncretism which looked so natural and unimportant, and which yet was destined to change the whole current of religious thought, and lead men

[1] Cf. p. 39. [2] Cf. p. 304. [3] Cooke, *North-Semitic Inscriptions*, 121.
[4] Myers, *Classical Essays*, p. 15. [5] Zosimus, i. 57.

back from polytheism to the worship of one God. Closely connected with this is that cult of Mithra of which Renan and Dill have written, but as there seems to be no trace of Mithra-worship either in Palmyra or Baalbek, we need not further refer to it. Syncretism is the blending of various religious cults, and the identification of the gods of one with those of another. It involves a somewhat startling facility of change. One would suppose it impossible for worshippers who had found satisfaction in the worship, say, of Apollo or of Jupiter, to transfer that worship to Baal with changed rites, upon the plea that this was but a new name for the old god. We have already referred to the fact that in recent times a village has been known to change its faith in consequence of an unanswered prayer.[1] Such light-hearted dealing with rival religions has obviously nothing in it beneath the surface. But the vague and fluid condition of religious thought in those early centuries rendered the transition easy even for sincere believers. Tolerance of the religious conceptions of others may be indeed the sign of a want of strong conviction, but it may also be the sign of the possession of a deep desire and wistfulness. Nothing could be more expressive than the beautiful story of Evandrus and his wife, whose question at the oracle of Dodona was "by what prayer or worship they may fare best now and for ever."[2]

It was an age of much travel, and the Roman soldiers were marching all about the world. Those travellers,

[1] Cf. p. 165.

[2] Myers, *Classical Essays*, p. 28.

and especially the soldiers, taking with them their need to worship and finding themselves far from their familiar gods,—taking with them also the proud conviction that their native land was the one home of truth, and that all other ways of thinking could only become fit for a civilised person after they had been translated in terms of their own ideas,—found in every real or imaginary resemblance a ground for identifying the foreign with the home divinities. So it came to pass that from Dacia to Egypt, and from Gaul and Britain to the Euphrates, the gods and goddesses of Olympus are identified under local names. All the chief gods of the nations are identified with these, while a fresh multitude of lesser deities is received into the Roman Pantheon. Thus the great god of Baalbek becomes Jupiter, while Aurelian recognises Apollo in the Yaribol of Palmyra, and the Palmyrene gods Azizou and Monimus are identified with Mars, Apollo, and the twin stars Phosphorus and Hesperus.[1]

To the less intelligent, the syncretic idea would never be complete, and the result of syncretism would simply be the multiplication of objects of worship. Elworthy cites a curious quotation from Lanciani, to the effect that "under the consulship of Caius Cæsar and Lucius Paulus, a freedman named Lucius Lucretius Zethus was warned in a vision by Jupiter, to raise an altar in honour of Augustus, under the invocation of "Mercurius Deus Æternus." Following these direc-

[1] *Répertoire*, 30.



COLONNADE, PALMYRA, WITH DRUZE CASTLE IN THE DISTANCE





tions, Lucretius Zethus had the altar made, and unwilling apparently to hurt the feelings of the gods in general, dedicated it not only to Mercury Augustus, but at the same time to Jupiter, Juno, Minerva, the sun, the moon, Apollo, Diana, Fortune, Ops, Isis, Piety, and the Fates."[1] Such cautious munificence reminds us of those statues of Apollo, on which mice are to be seen on the feet, in the hand, or even among the hair of the god. The nobler worship had superseded the early totemism, but it seemed prudent to show respect for that also, lest after all there might have been something in it.[2] This kind of caution is frequently seen in men's dealings with charms as well as with gods, many of the ancient amulets being massed in bundles or actually made composite, so that no chance might be lost. One frog-charm has been found, on which the frog sits within the crescent of the moon-goddess, the inscription engraved on the crescent being JESUS + MARIA[3]—perhaps the most cautious example of Christianity keeping in touch with the old paganism that is on record. Similarly many worshippers in the court of Baalbek must have felt that there was safety in numbers. It was a device like that of which the ribbald accuse medical practitioners, calling a very composite prescription a *mitrailleuse*. When in doubt, it seems safest to try everything, and if ten things miss, one at least may hit. The humorous aspect of the situation is sufficiently obvious, yet it has a

[1] *The Evil Eye*, p. 129. [2] Cf. Andrew Lang, *Custom and Myth*.
[3] *The Evil Eye*, p. 311.

pathetic aspect also. Rudyard Kipling, writing of a very similar situation in India to-day, has doubtless expressed what must have been in the minds of many of those older worshippers :—

> The smoke upon your Altar dies,
>   The flowers decay ;
> The Goddess of your sacrifice
>   Has flown away.
> What profit, then, to sing or slay
> The sacrifice from day to day ?
>
> "We know the Shrine is void," they said,
>   "The Goddess flown ;
> Yet wreaths are on the altar laid—
>   The Altar-Stone
> Is black with fumes of sacrifice,
> Albeit She has fled our eyes.
>
> "For, it may be, if still we sing
>   And tend the Shrine,
> Some Deity on wandering wing
>   May there incline,
> And, finding all in order meet,
> Stay while we worship at Her feet." [1]

From this multiplication of deities it was but a step to pantheism. Each individual god and goddess was associated with some part of the land on which men dwelt, the earth he laboured on, the air he breathed, or the sky that spread its canopy over all. From their association with the divinity, these drew a divineness of their own, and as the sharp edge of personality was lost, all things became merged in deity and deity

[1] "L'Envoi," *Departmental Ditties.*

merged in all things. This, however, has left comparatively few traces in the records of these centuries. It may have been the view of many thinkers,[1] and in the philosophies of the syncretic period there is abundant evidence of it. But, just as in our own day we have seen in India, so then also, pantheism is but a temporary stage between polytheism and a greater thought than either, the conception of the One Great God.

The theory which replaced pantheism was that the many gods are but symbols of the various operations of the One Power behind life. Long ago the religion of ancient Iran had approached to monotheism in its worship of the Highest of the Gods, "who had made heaven and earth and men, and for these everything good." It was a simpler and more spiritual worship than those which rose in the West, and it held men's faith until another monotheism, that of Mohammed, conquered it.[2] Faith in the details of mythology decayed, but the national and individual associations of the temple worship kept it still dear to men's hearts and imperative upon their consciences. The lust of the eye held some to the splendid rituals ; others, in that age of broadcast vices, when the conscience of society was everywhere defiled, were driven back upon anything which professed to cleanse the conscience from the stain of sin. The joint result of such opposing

[1] Of Symmachus Professor Dill says that "probably, like so many of his class for ages, he was a sceptic whose inner creed was a vague monotheism." (*Roman Society*, p. 14.)

[2] Mommsen, *Provinces*, 9.

forces was a symbolic instead of a literal interpretation of the ancient pantheon.

Polytheism is often the result of too great busyness. Men, detached and thinking, perceive the unity of life and nature, and tend to the worship of One supreme Lord of all. For many centuries, from the time of Zenophanes, whom Aristotle credits with the saying that God is "the one," this process had, more or less consciously, been going on in the thought of Greek and Roman sages. To quote but one example from the *Treatise on the Sublime*: "Much superior to the passages respecting the Battle of the Gods are those which represent the divine nature as it really is,—pure, and great, and undefiled."[1] It had been the fashion for centuries among classical writers to speak of the majesty of God in very much the same phrases as those of modern Christianity, and that monotheism after which the earliest Greek philosophers were feeling had already become a commonly held opinion among the educated, at the same time as the pantheons of Baalbek and other temples were massing the gods in hundreds. The fact is, as Professor Dill has pointed out, that the very multitude of these late religions was leading towards unity. They could not all be true representations of what lay behind the veil, and the more of them there were, the less clearly were men able to conceive of any as the absolute truth. What happened was that from the chaos of innumerable beliefs, a few central ideas stood out clear, which were plainly in some degree common to them all. The

[1] Longinus, ix. 8.

syncretic fashion of the age had already drawn the attention of worshippers away from differentiating details to common ideas, and the inevitable result was the transference of particular articles of belief, such as the mythological stories, from the region of history to that of allegory. They were no longer narratives concerning the individual lives of separate divine beings, but symbols of the manifold operations of One great power that wrought everywhere and in all things. The rites and even the stories were retained, but now in the symbolic sense. "The Great Reality can by any human soul be only dimly conceived, and expressed only in a rude fragmentary way. We see the Divine One in religious myths 'as through a glass darkly.' Yet, if we purge mythology of the gross fancies of rude ages, the myths may be used as a consecrated language of devotion."[1] Such thoughts may remain long hidden in the minds of philosophers, ineffective upon the general mass of mankind. But the Roman soldier and the Greek artificer, travelling from land to land and bringing with them everywhere that syncretism which identified the gods of one land with those of others, were actually forcing upon the mind of every thoughtful worshipper the symbolic interpretation of his religion, and so were unconsciously becoming the most powerful advocates of monotheism. Thus did paganism hasten toward its end, already in the third century growing intellectually nobler, as in Julian's time it was to awaken to the demands of

[1] *Roman Society*, p. 8.

conscience alike for purity in worship and pity for the suffering humanity around.

How much of this finer spirit had touched Palmyra and Baalbek we do not know. It can hardly have been widely prevalent in Palmyra, if we have judged the character of the people aright; and Baalbek was probably too sensual for any considerable development of it. Yet we have in Palmyra an early altar dedicated to an "unknown god," which may possibly indicate some such wistful search as we have been describing, though, on the other hand, it may be simply a god whom the builder believed to have blessed him, but whose name was either unknown to him or forgotten. More to our point are those votive inscriptions from which the name of the god is omitted, such as "To him whose name is blessed for ever."[1] This is undoubtedly meant for Baal Shamim, Lord of eternity or Lord of the world. The reverential omission of the name, as well as the form of the ascription, probably point to Jewish influence, as Mr. Cooke has noted. But whether that be the case or not, there can be no mistake as to their indication of the monotheistic direction which men's thoughts of the divine were taking. And this leads us to the subject of Baal-worship, for it was to Baal that syncretism led up. Yaribol was the chief local deity of Palmyra, and Azizou and Monimus were some of his fellows. But beyond and above them was this Great Baal Shamim, transcendent and apart.[2]

[1] *North-Semitic Inscriptions*, 135.

[2] *Ibid.* p. 133. Compare a footnote in Professor George Adam Smith's



TEMPLE OF THE SUN, PALMYRA





Nothing could better illustrate the process from polytheism to monotheism, or at least the materials for such a process, than the ancient worship of Baal. The name signifies "Lord" or "Husband," and indicates that combination of power over his worshippers and close union with their life which is characteristic of Nature-worship. The attractiveness of such worship is curiously illustrated in the fact that there exists to this day a sect of Baal-worshippers in Syria. They are known as Nusairiyeh, and are regarded as descendants of the Hittites. Their chief seat is in the territory between Antioch and Tripoli, and they still observe many of the rites anciently practised in the worship of Baal, among others the adoration of the sun, moon, and stars.[1] Baal-worshippers are found elsewhere also; for the religion of the earth and the worship of Nature is wide and indestructible as the human race and its passions. If Elijah were on earth to-day he would not need to go to Carmel to find either prophets or worshippers of Baal.

From the nature of the case, Baal has two different meanings. Nature appeals to man locally, in the form of some particular mountain or valley, grove or stream. For the fertility of the earth the man depends especially upon water and sun, so that in these most of all he will see the appearing of the divine. Thus it was inevitable

Jerusalem (ii. 453), on the sacrifices offered in the temple to Olympian Zeus. It will be observed that the Hebrew words translated "Abomination of desolation" include this word Shamim.

[1] Wilson, *Picturesque Palestine.*

that there should be as many Baals as there were sources of fertility. Yet each of these is but a local manifestation of the universal power which fertilises the earth and makes it fruitful. The title Baal may be used of the local manifestation or of the universal power, and that double significance gives us the clue to many perplexing questions regarding the Eastern gods.

The gods and goddesses of Palmyra were many, and it is extremely difficult to discover their exact relations to one another. Besides such divinities as Atar of the heavens, who may be supposed to represent the Ouranian Venus, and whose worship corresponds to that practised in the Venus temple near that of Baal in Baalbek, the gods oftenest named are Yaribol, Malakbol, and Aglibol. The termination of each of these three names shews them to have been particular Baals, connected respectively with the city, the sun, and the moon. But besides these there are references to Baal Shamim or simply to Baal (or Bel), such as a tessera with the circular inscription "Bel protects the son of Bola."[1] Here, then, we seem to have precisely that set of conditions which we have already described, a recognition of One supreme and universal power manifesting itself in various particular ways. The syncretic idea, of course, would only be realised clearly by the more thoughtful, the vulgar treating each indiscriminately as a more or less powerful individual god. The crowd is ever impatient of the fine distinctions of

[1] *Répertoire*, 443.

the theologian, and simplifies his subtleties to a cruder and more popular system of its own.

Two features, however, were obvious to the meanest intelligence. One was the connection of Baal-worship with the sun ; the other was its connection with sensual licence. The sun, both as friend and as enemy, is Lord of the Eastern lands in a degree which no one can realise till he has crossed the desert. Again, the story of the year, with its winter death and spring resurrection, is the work of the sun also. The priests of the Baalbek temple, watching for the first flash of sunrise on the snowy peak of Sannin, needed no argument to convince them of the sun's divinity as they began their ceremonies in the dawn ; and Julian found it best to centre his reconstructed paganism in the worship of the solar god. As to the licentiousness which was the peculiar contribution of Eastern to Western worship, it is too well known to require anything but the briefest notice here. The Roman spirit was founded on conceptions of military discipline and forensic law. It was necessarily conventional and hidebound, and the spirit of man welcomed the freedom which threw open to him every avenue of sense and of imagination. The Eastern religions were in sympathy with the fulness of human life in its sensual as well as in its spiritual desires. They blended the two in that seductive synthesis in which it is impossible to distinguish body from soul, or earth from heaven.

A poor enough summary this may seem of a nation's faith—the sun above them and the green earth below,

and all that these stand for in the life of man. Yet, at a time like that, there was the promise of a rich future in the syncretism that was reducing the bewildering multitude of primitive divinities to even that simplicity. The sun and the senses, suggesting the blending of heaven and earth in nature, did at least enforce the thought of unity. True, the Nature-unity was both material and foul beyond description. Yet it was there, ready for some new spiritualising and cleansing power, that might give to the world one Great Lord of all things, and might confirm the harmony between man and nature in Him.

Leaving aside the grossness and the sensuality, which happily are no longer anywhere the acknowledged accompaniments of man's search for God, we find in that hunger of the soul which vainly sought to satisfy itself in these untoward ways, one more proof of the eternity of worship amid the passing shows of life. Among the actual forces of the world, prayer is, after all, the greatest and the most persistent—greater than either arms or commerce or any other enterprise of mankind. These temples, built in spite of the decline of faith, bear eloquent testimony to man's inalienable right and unquenchable desire to worship. And it was not Palmyra and Baalbek alone that built their temples to dead or dying gods. Most men have in some way or other misconceived the highest, and many have but the more passionately striven to reach Him when they were discovering that their faith had to live by a receding light.



THE TEMPLE OF JUPITER, BAALBEK—ANOTHER VIEW





Yet for more than two centuries the world had been worshipping One who had professed to give men all that they were seeking so vainly elsewhere. Beyond a doubtful cross scratched upon some pagan altar, there is no trace anywhere of Christ in Palmyra. In Baalbek His Church established herself in the hated basilica only after she had often sent forth her martyrs to the amphitheatre. Yet it was just this Christ that their tottering paganism was groping for through all its miry and foolish ways. He came, not as a rival god, scorning the weaker deities He displaced, but as the very truth of all that they had sought to express of human need assuaged by intercourse with the divine. He brought to man the assurance of His unity with God, and He set love upon the throne where its poor parody of lust had sat. The ancient city had poured out the lavishness of its wealth upon its Temple of the Sun. His new city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof. The apostle saw no temple in that city, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it. The sun, and the temple of the sun, were at best but symbols of that spiritual communion which the heart of man must seek until it finds. The symbols had imprisoned the spirits which they sought to guide, and Christ set men free from this as from other bondage. But it was by a very different way from that voluptuous path which the East had found. Love triumphant through sacrifice, where love had been vanquished and

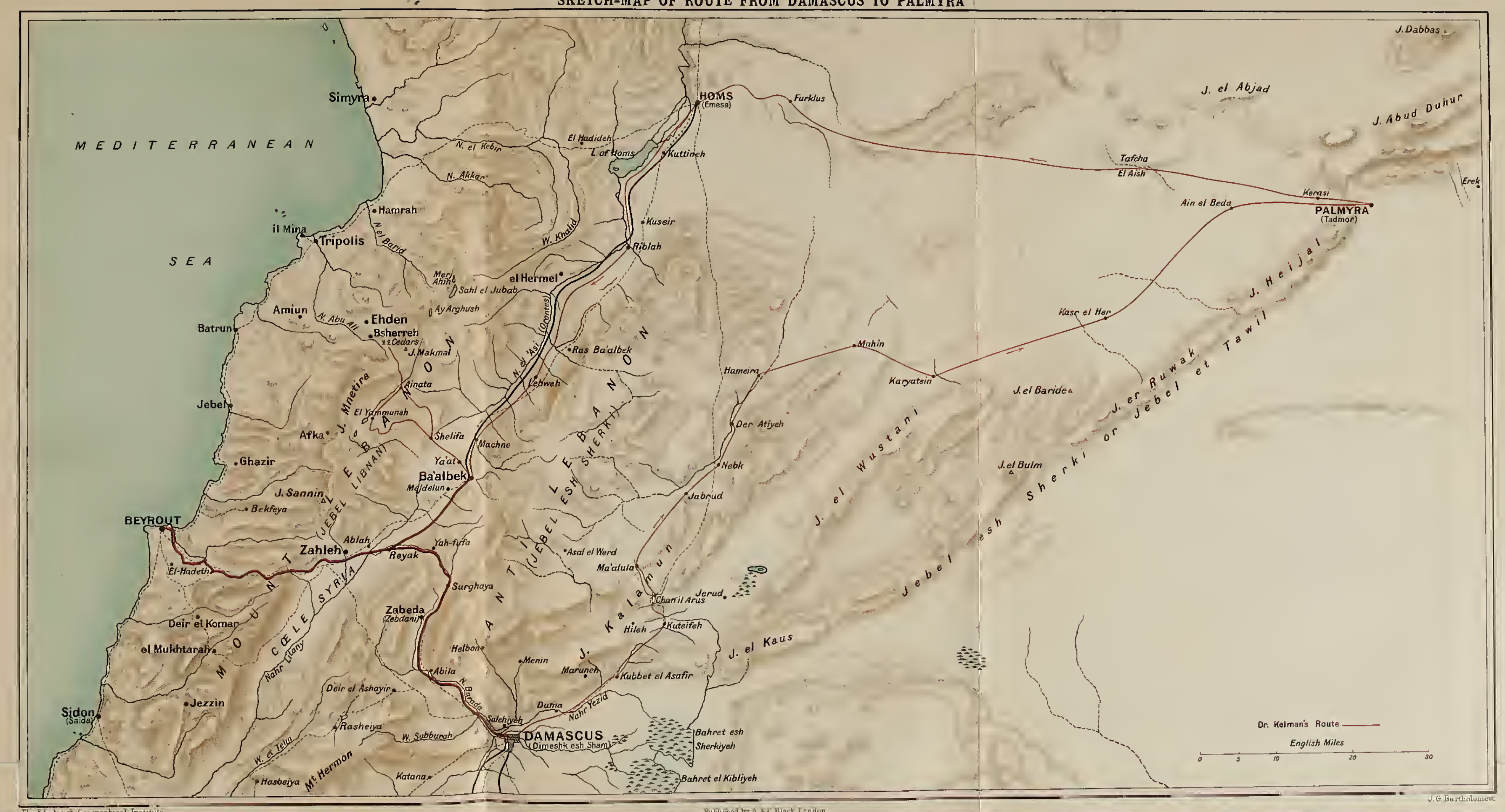
enslaved through indulgence — that is the now open secret of the world. The temples and the tombs and the palaces are fallen, and Christ has triumphed not over them only but over all the life of man. The tall cross of Calvary stands alone upon that field of wreckage, the one thing erect amidst the scattered fragments of the earlier world.

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THE END

Printed by R. & R. Clark, Limited, *Edinburgh*.


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English Miles
0 5 10 20 30
The Edinburgh Geographical Institute
Published by A. & C. Black London
J. G. Bartholomew





